

“We’ve Been Robbed . . . of Two Stanzas”

Pastor Sam Richards

20 August 2023

Text: John 17:1-19

**Father, do Thou glorify Me with Thy own self.**

The suspicion that we’ve been robbed occurred to me while I was doing my devotional work on John 17:1-19. It popped up when I came verse 5. As I prayerfully reflected on this verse, there surfaced a phrase from “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.” This familiar Christmas hymn/carol was penned by Charles Wesley in 1739. It was edited and shortened to the three verses we are acquainted with in 1758 by the eminent evangelist George Whitefield. This Christmas Hymn, to be read on Christmas Day, was eviscerated and emaciated by said deletion! This was during The Great Awakening—which was a powerful spiritual move of God, a revival revolutionary in its impact. It is reported, that the jails in Boston were emptied of detainees, that public drunkenness, domestic violence and debauchery (lascivious public immorality) had all declined. God was preparing the colonies for American Revolution spiritually! A tidal wave of righteousness swept the colonies! It had an ameliorative and beneficial effect on colonial social life. *That in itself embodies a hopefulness; it was a living proof that reformation rooted in faith, in a change of heart, can transform society.*

I am not certain that I have ever read about the influence of The Great Awakening as preparatory for our Revolution. Or about the decline in crime as essential to liberty. Rather some espouse negative, or diminutive views: “tax evasion by an emergent nation of shirkers,” or “rebelliousness against the crown” as more suitable explanations. The greatness of our aspiration to become a republic, with “liberty and justice for all”—a phrase capturing our best of motivations. But we tapped into the deepest aspirations of the entire Western world, our longing to be free and self-governing. Our detractors degrade what ought to be exalted! Those who are into abjection, and general pessimism (like the extremist advocates of total depravity), who attribute *the worst* to Americans historically (racist, supremacists, utterly backwards), are also those who hate patriotism. They belittle the greatness of our noble aspiration and transmute them into what is evil, the very worst! We are disallowed both moral excellence, and the politically admirable in the telling of our story. If I were to suggest a label for those of this disposition, I would suggest “Derogatorians.” Believing themselves morally superior, elite, they indict those not of their sect as “Deplor-ables.” Among the Tories, those who favored the crown and opposed the Revolution, were Derogatorians, siding with the nay-sayers. They did hold their neighbors in high regard as capable of self-government—the public believed lies, were an unredeemable and worthless lot of rascals.

If we were to revolt against the crown for liberty, self-governance and justice (for all), we would need to do so as a nation of the highest moral quality—capable of governing ourselves!. General Washington’s army was a case in point, no drinking or drunkenness, no fornication with “camp followers” etc. Our overlords, Parliament and the British crown

believed we were “deplorables” who had to be ruled by iron imperialist fist! So, without our consent, taxes were levied and laws were passed which put us in bondage and we were occupied by quartering troops and military rule. We were all enslaved to the British crown. *That was the cultural setting* for The Great Awakening and Revolution!

As I read v. 5, **Father, do Thou glorify Me with Thy own self.** I “heard “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see! . . . Born that man no more may die, born to give the sons of earth second birth!” Then I read **which** (glory) **I had with Thee before the world was. I have manifested Thy Name unto men, which Thou gavest Me out of the world.** Then, almost without thinking, there flashed before me depictions of our Lord, post-resurrection versus post-ascension ones. And in the latter, the post-resurrection depictions, I noted that *the glory whereof Christ speaks in vv.5-6 was yet veiled!* This fact goes a long way to explaining why Mary might mistake the Lord for the gardener/caretaker of the grounds at the tomb—as well as the failure of the two disciples *to recognize the Risen Lord* on the Emmaus Road. Yes, coupled with the lack of expectation, neither of these parties expected to meet the risen Lord—let alone sharing a meal with breaking of the bread—believing Him to be in the tomb, both dead and buried.

Filled with awe at the words “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see! . . . Born that man no more may die, born to give the sons of earth second birth!” v.3 and by **Father, do Thou glorify Me with Thy own self which** (glory) **I had with Thee before the world was. I have manifested Thy Name unto men, which Thou gavest Me out of the world.** Here are the lyrics to “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing ;”

\_\_\_1. Hark! the herald angels sing,

"Glory to the new born King,  
peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled!"

Joyful, all ye nations rise,  
join the triumph of the skies;  
with th' angelic host proclaim,  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

Hark! the herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the new born King!"

2. Christ, by highest heaven adored; (source)

Christ, the everlasting Lord;  
late in time behold him come,  
offspring of a virgin's womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;  
hail th' incarnate Deity,  
pleased with us in flesh to dwell,  
Jesus, our Emmanuel.

Hark! the herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the new born King!" (Prelude)

3. Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! (source)

Hail the Sun of Righteousness!  
 Light and life to all he brings,  
 risen with healing in his wings.  
 Mild he lays his glory by,  
 born that we no more may die,  
 born to raise us from the earth,  
 born to give us second birth.  
 Hark! the herald angels sing,  
 "Glory to the new born King!"

I wondered what the original hymn included any additional verses? Had anything been removed? YES! And here are Wesley's verses 4 and 5:

4. Come, Desire of Nations, come,  
 Fix in Us they humble home.  
 Rise, the woman s conqu ring Seed  
 Bruise in Us the Serpent's Head.  
 Now display thy saving Pow'r  
 Ruined Nature now restore,  
 Now in Mystic Union join  
 Thine to Ours and Ours to Thine.

5. *Adam's* likeness, LORD, efface,  
 Stamp thy Image in its Place,  
 Second *Adam* from above  
 Reinstate us in the Love.  
 Let us Thee, tho' lost, regain,  
 Thee, the Life, the Inner Man:  
 O! To All Thyself impart  
 Form'd in each Believing Heart<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Many of the carols we sing have a rich theological tradition, and "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!" is no exception. It was written by Charles Wesley, who was an English Methodist leader and hymn writer. **Wesley wrote over 6,000 hymns, more than any other male writer** (Fanny Crosby wrote 8,000).

His goal in writing hymns was to teach the poor and illiterate sound doctrine. His brother, John Wesley, a famous theologian and founder of Methodism, said that Charles' hymnal was the best theological book in existence. Some have noted that Methodism was born in song and Charles was the chief songwriter.

**Wesley, inspired by the sounds of London church bells while walking to church on Christmas Day, wrote the "Hark" poem about a year after his conversion to be read on Christmas Day.** The poem first appeared in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* in 1739 with the opening line of "Hark, how the welkin (heaven) rings."  
**In 1753? (1758),**

George Whitefield, a student and eventual colleague of Wesley's, adapted the poem into the song we now know today. It was Whitefield who penned the phrase "newborn King."

God has sent the One who will reconcile the sinner back to Himself.

**The Theology Behind:** "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" The first stanza describes the good news of the savior's birth. God has sent the One who will reconcile the sinner back to Himself. Therefore, all the nations should rise and sing and proclaim the good news, which is

So, under the Christmas tree, Charles Wesley had presented five gifts, and an editor, George Whitefield, took two of the five gifts away! Like a porch pirate, he removed them so that we live oblivious to their existence . . . hence unopened and un-enjoyed. And that is why I say we were robbed of the rich theological, and doctrinal content of “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.”

Allow me to illuminate, or restore some of that content. When Wesley writes, **Come**, it should be clear to us that this is an allusion to the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus will come as Judge of the living and the dead, and He will judge all by one standard: the standard of His righteousness (Romans 2:11-17). Whether we broke the law revealed naturally to every person in his conscience, or whether we broke the law as mercifully revealed to us in God’s word—we have all failed, sinned, missed the mark. Secondly, we have **Desire of Nations**. This title for Jesus makes the international significance of his mission crystal clear. Jesus was not merely the fulfillment of the desires of Israel, but of the whole human race.—there being only one race, and yet many nations.

A timeless, universal desire of mankind. Jesus is the desired king, the coming and reigning one. Our “experiment” embodied the aspirations of a tired world wearied of oppression, endless wars (religious and political), fed up with injustice, corruption and greed: we wanted to be the world’s best hope . . . and so we are, or can be.

Our condition was dire, and perishing was the only option for no man is justified by the works of the law—natural, or revealed!—we need a Redeemer, a Savior because in respect of this failure to keep the law, we are all “lost.” Or, for those who wish to quibble, we say, God expects perfect obedience and we, in our imperfection, simply cannot attain that mark. **But with God all things are possible.** (Matt. 19:26)

**Fix in us thy humble Home** is likewise invitational; we are inviting Christ to indwell us, to mend us. This enables us to abide in Him as He abides in us! It is a promise. The dwelling (Home) is humble because it is in us; but His presence in us is redemptive, sanctifying, purifying, cleansing and healing! The effect of His indwelling is holiness and the outcome of holiness is that we, purified, **shall see God! *Seeing God is the greatest things in all Creation!!***

**Rise . . . you conquering Seed of Woman!** Thus the gospel first declared in Gen. 3:15 is fulfilled in Christ. He **bruises the Serpent’s head** **The bruising of the Serpent s head is ongoing—it occurs with every victory we have over our Adversary!** Wonder of wonders this is achieved through the indwelling presence just pled in the previous line. Every sin

---

Christ the King! The next stanza speaks to the mysticism of Christ s coming and the good news in it. The final stanza tells of the accomplishment of Christ and the power that it brings.

<https://jamesriver.church/blog/story-behind-hark-herald-angels-sing>

refused, every temptation thwarted in every righteous act is another blow to Satan’s head, a set back, a defeat, a bruising!

Now **display thy saving Pow’r**, again, is achieved in and through us but extending beyond personal salvation, Wesley brings all of **Ruin’d Nature into view**. *How deep and expansive is this revelation! A part of nature is restored every time a believer is saved.* This is good spiritual stewardship, genuine conservation. This is the essential link between us and the rest of the created order! In restoring us, He is restoring all. We all lament the fallen, corrupt and compromised condition of the world under the dominion of Satan and the lawless rule of sin. We have witnessed first hand what lust, envy, hate, greed, ambition and dishonesty have done: *sin ruins everything!*

**Mystic Union** may have posed a problem for the editor, George Whitefield,, the evangelist; but not for Wesley. It bespeaks of the church invisible, and of Christian mysticism—something I am fairly certain Wesley was more comfortable with than Whitefield. Mystics probably featured among the devotional works Wesley studied and may even have been represented in spiritual direction (where a mentor assists the spiritual work and prayer life of another Christian). It echoes the sentiment expressed in another great Hymn, “The Church’s One Foundation,” v.4:

4 Yet she on earth hath union  
with God, the Three in one,  
and mystic sweet communion  
with those whose rest is won.  
O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, give us grace that we  
like them, the meek and lowly,  
on high may dwell with thee.

“**Join Thine to Ours, and Ours to Thine**” writes Wesley raising to consciousness both the doctrine of the church, and the doctrine of the Trinity! Then, in verse 5, Wesley has “**Adam’s likeness, LORD, efface, Stamp thy Image in its Place,**” efface the sin nature likeness we have to Adam. After recognizing our sin nature (as from Adam), Wesley has us plead that the image of Adam being overwritten, or re-stamped with the divine image which was first lost through sin and rebellion. Or, because Wesley explicitly names the re-stamping as **Second Adam**, we are emboldened to say that this is the image of Christ, who is Second Adam from above! Reinstating— what a great word!—reinstating us **in Thy Love**. As a perfect expression of your redeeming love, Lord, put us back in the condition we were in (pure, holy, worshipful and attendant on Thee-serving Thee!) as before the Fall. ***This reinstatement refutes the theory of evolution at its core because we return, having been redeemed, to the spiritual standing we once held (only we are refined, enhanced and glorified*** as it is written we go from glory to glory until in heaven we take our place! “Love Divine All Loves Excelling,” *verse 4*:

4 Finish then, Thy new creation;  
pure and spotless let us be;  
let us see Thy great salvation  
perfectly restored in Thee.  
Changed from glory into glory,

till in heav'n we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before Thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Redemption makes us new, innocent and guileless again! Not ignorant, nor ungrateful, but fully instructed in the wonders of your love.

**Let us Thee, tho' lost, regain Thee, the Life are.** If losing Thee were the only cost for rebellion, that would have been grave enough. But, no, pain, affliction, death and suffering tormented our imprisoned souls from the beginning. **Thee, the Life, the Inner Man:** that the indwelling Christ would become our selves is a reach for us. This idea suggests a strand of subjectivity the modern Christian self struggles to accommodate. We can inch closer if we use terms like **new creation, Second Adam, new creature in Christ** because these don't hint at the obliteration of self implied in **regain/Thee, the Life, the Inner Man**. If we speak of **dying to our self** and join that to being **raised in resurrection glory**, we are in the neighborhood of grasping what is meant by **regain, Thee . . . the Inner Man**.

Because it doesn't get easier with **Of All Thyself impart/Form'd in each Believing Heart**. Clearly **the Inner Man** and **All Thyself** are referring to the same concept. Yes, we want others to see Christ in us, **the hope of glory** but (**the Inner Man . . . form'd in each believing Heart** suggests that this *formation; or transformation is total, or complete* with no "me" left over. My personal identity in Christ is the totality of all that's there! A prevalent Christlikeness . . . that is our family resemblance for all who obtain heaven! In our perfected state, that is who we have become! Not were, not are but truly shall be!

Desire of every nation, the indwelling Christ. Ruined Nature, Mystic Union enjoined, Adam Likeness and Second Adam likeness (divine image which is Christlikeness), the Inner Man/Life/Thyself all formed in us—worked in us by Christ's love! All the ingredients of the two gifts taken away, but now restored. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" is as Wesley wrote it a summing up of all salvation's story (from ruin to restoration) going beyond the joyful announcement of Jesus' birth.

**Amen.**