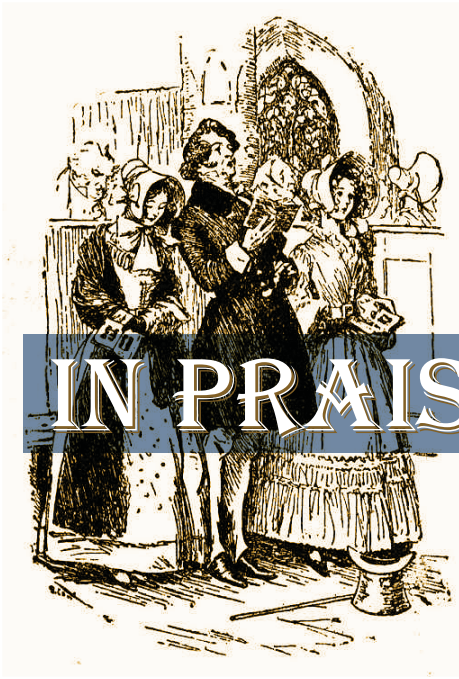


In the good old days the typical worship service might end with a quiet, encouraging hymn of benediction, or “good word,” such as the following, adapted from Numbers 6:24-26—

*The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord lift His countenance upon you,
And give you peace, and give you peace;
The Lord make His face to shine upon you,
And be gracious, and be gracious,
The Lord be gracious, gracious unto you.*

—which often would be followed by the inspiring, classic sevenfold “Amen.”



IN PRAISE OF THE HYMN

The Best Word

When I was a kid growing up in the First Baptist Temple, the opening chords of this song always signaled to me the welcome, and long-anticipated end of another tiresome hour spent on a hard wooden pew. It signaled the beginning of the time when I need no longer be embarrassed by the empty rumblings of my stomach, quaking in eager expectation of Mom’s delicious pot roast or roasted chicken.

It was tradition. It was the way of things.

There’s a different tradition I’d like to see take hold in our churches. Instead of ending our time with God with the customary benedictory hymn or prayer, I’d like to see us end

our worship with a return to the praise with which we began. Instead of simply ending our service with its obligatory ending to get us out the door, let’s end it with a summary declaration of the presence and personality of the Lord God.

We worship together, first, to adore and magnify our God, but after that priority, we also come together to learn of His ways, testify to His ministry in our lives, encourage and edify each other in the faith, and to offer up intercessory prayers.

How appropriate, then, to end our time of corporate worship with a hymn that somehow summarizes all of this in a strong declaration

and heading-out-the-door reminder of who our God is. We should be leaving the sanctuary, not with stiff joints from a hard pew and a rumbling stomach, but with our minds filled with an image of God upon His throne, and our hearts energized by His presence!

God’s immensity does not change based on our perception of Him. The truth of God is that He is, in the true sense of the word, great—He is grand and glorious.

There are gods who wish us to remain blind to the truth about them. They revel in deceit, and present themselves to us as angels of light when in truth they are vermin of darkness.

Reflections
by the Pond

No. 416

October 12, 2009

But the Lord God of heaven desires that our eyes be kept fully open. He has nothing to hide. He knows that the more fully we comprehend His truth—the more we see Him as He truly is—the closer will be our communion with Him. And that is His true desire.

O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord,
Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our
salvation.
Let us come before His presence with
thanksgiving,
Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.
For the Lord is a great God
And a great King above all gods.

Psalms 95:1-3

*O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy pow'r thro'out the universe displayed.*

Our God is inescapable. He has left his fingerprints on everything around and above us. To gaze into the starry hosts and not see God is to question the very premise of a supreme being.

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Colossians 1:16

And we are left with only one way to respond: to joyfully sing His praise.

*Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!*

If it is true that the quietude of nature draws us one step closer to the presence of God, it is equally true that the sounds manufactured by civilization more often insulate us from Him. They represent for us society's bent away from God, and as such, work against the indwelling Spirit's bent toward God.

Our quiet place may not always be a forested glen. We can commune with Him in the arid solitude of the desert; on the shoreline, with its pounding breakers masking the sounds of everything else; in the privacy of our car, while on the freeway; or in a quiet,

inner room of the house. Wherever it may be, we must find and use often that personal place where it is easiest for us to find God's holy presence. We must find and frequent that place where His voice is not masked by the invasive cacophony of the world.

*When thro' the woods
and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
When I look down
from lofty mountain grandeur,
And hear the brook
and feel the gentle breeze.*



*Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!*

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”

John 15:12-13

Look up into His face and praise Him for loving you enough to die so that you might live. He didn't bargain His way out of it, but went voluntarily to the shame and degradation of that hideous death—for you. He didn't die for you alone, but He died knowing your name.

*And when I think that God,
His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in,
That on the cross,
my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.*

*Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!*

But this Jesus, this Christ, did not remain in the grave, but rose victoriously in defeat of death, turning the shame and humiliation of the cross back on Satan himself. We do not worship a dead Savior, but one who lives today as He has always lived: at the right hand of God the Father.

So open the floodgates of praise and worship Him!

*When Christ shall come
with shout of acclamation
And take me home,
what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration,
And there proclaim,
my God, how great Thou art!*

*Then sings my soul,
my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art,
how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul,
my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art,
how great Thou art!*

Carl Boberg;
translated by Stuart K. Hine

