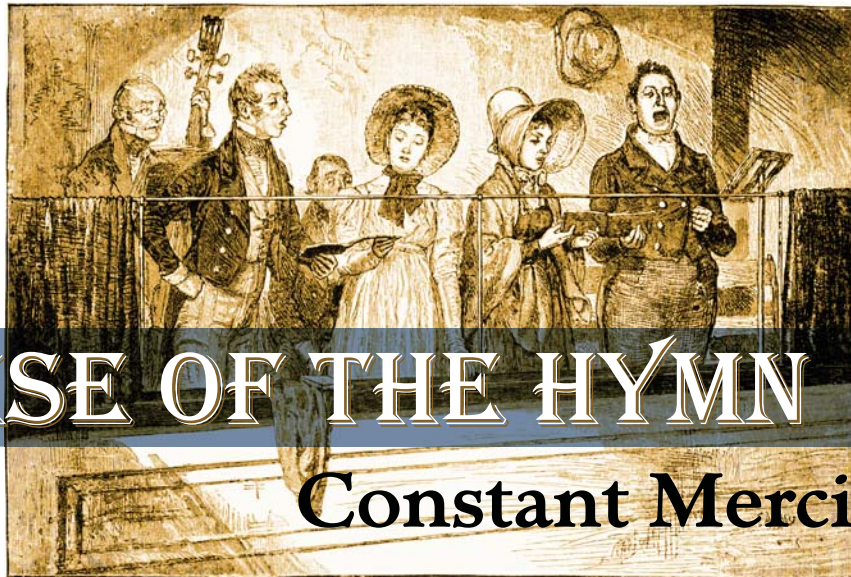


The number of *types* of hymns is almost limitless. Webster's defines a hymn as "a song in praise or honor of God, a god, or gods," but in practice our hymnals also contain songs that explain our faith, witness to God's mercy and grace, pray for help, evangelize, express confession of sins, and illuminate Scripture. And many hymns—in fact, most—combine one or more of these types.



IN PRAISE OF THE HYMN

Constant Mercies

On its surface, "Great is Thy Faithfulness" falls into the category of praise or worship, since it is declaring an attribute of God: His faithfulness. The song is taken from the book of Lamentations, written by the prophet Jeremiah—

This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.
The Lord's lovingkindness indeed
never cease,
For His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:21-23

—as well as the epistle of James.

Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

James 1:16-17 KJV

Yet this favorite hymn is so much more. It is also a song of comfort for the oppressed: *God is faithful and merciful. He'll not let you down.* In addition, the song is a strong testimony, given by the saved to the unsaved: *Look! Look at what our God is like. He will be the same for you!*

As we sing this hymn together, rejoicing in the compassion and faithfulness of our God,

notice how the words of this prayer represent so many different aspects of life in Christ.

*"Great is Thy faithfulness," O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not,
Thy compassions they fail not;
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.*

Thus says God the Lord,
Who created the heavens and stretched
them out,
Who spread out the earth and its offspring,
Who gives breath to the people on it
And spirit to those who walk in it,
"I am the Lord, I have called You in
righteousness,

Reflections
by the Pond

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I will also hold You by the hand and watch
over You,
And I will appoint You as a covenant to
the people,
As a light to the nations,
To open blind eyes,
To bring out prisoners from the dungeon
And those who dwell in darkness
from the prison.
I am the Lord, that is My name;
I will not give My glory to another,
Nor My praise to graven images."

Isaiah 42:5-8

*Summer and winter, and
springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.*

The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green
pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.
He restores my soul;
He guides me in the paths of
righteousness
For His name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of
the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort
me.
You prepare a table before me in the
presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil; My
cup overflows.
Surely goodness and lovingkindness will
follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.

Psalms 23:1-6

*Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth
Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and
bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside!*

*"Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!"
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
"Great is Thy faithfulness," Lord, unto me!*

Thomas O. Chisholm

UNIVERSAL TRUTH

Surely hymns are most valued as trusted
reminders of who God is. No matter their sub-

ject or theme, most hymns serve to describe,
in one way or another, the personality or ways
of our God. Even evangelistic hymns designed
to win lost souls do so by telling what God
has done for them already—

*Have you any room for Jesus,
He who bore your load of sin?
As He knocks and asks admission,
Sinner will you let Him in?*

Unknown

—or will do in the future.

*Come, every soul by sin oppressed,
There's mercy with the Lord,*



*And He will surely give you rest
By trusting in His word.*

John H. Stockman

Even hymns that are more horizontal (per-
son to person, rather than the vertical person
to God), about the body of Christ, remind
us that the church is based upon the sure
foundation of Christ—

*The Church's one Foundation
is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is His new creation,
by water and the word:
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.*

Samuel J. Stone

—and our mutual adoration of the one God.

*Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;*

*The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.*

John Fawcett

Songs of testimony are testifying to how
Jesus Christ saved us by His mercy—

*I was lost, but Jesus found me,
Found the sheep that went astray,
Threw His loving arms around me,
Drew me back into His way.
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,
Sing it with the saints in glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea.*

Francis H. Rowley

—how He brings peace to the believer every
day.

*Feasting on the riches of His grace,
Resting 'neath His sheltering wing,
Always looking on His smiling face,
That is why I shout and sing.
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus—
Sweetest name I know,
Fills my every longing,
Keeps me singing as I go.*

Luther B. Bridgers

If all the thousands of hymns ever written
have a common purpose, it is—like Scripture—
to keep the truth of God before His people.
And how very much we need that every day.

The Christian life is one of constantly
swimming upstream against the muck and
refuse of the society in which we must, at least
for awhile, reside. Daily we are battered by the
unsightly ways of this world; how precious
are the wise words of truth contained in our
hymns—not only to remind and educate, but
to lift us up above this temporal plane, into the
pristine heights of the throne room of God.

Next Week: *The Best Word*



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