

Hymns of the Faith: “To God Be the Glory”

By [Dr. Bill Wymond](#)

*A Presentation of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi
with
Dr. Ligon Duncan, Dr. Derek Thomas, and Dr. Bill Wymond*

Dr. Wymond: Good morning! This is “Hymns of the Faith,” brought to you by Jackson's First Presbyterian Church. The minister of the First Presbyterian Church is Dr. Ligon Duncan. Stay tuned for “Hymns of the Faith.”... Here with “Hymns of the Faith” is Dr. Ligon Duncan.

Dr. Duncan: Thank you, Bill Wymond! It is a delight to be with you and with Derek Thomas this morning on “Hymns of the Faith.”

We move maybe as far into the modern era of hymnody as we've been in some time on “Hymns of the Faith,” and it seems like we've been sort of plunging into some of the riches of the sixteenth and seventeenth and eighteenth centuries mostly. Now we come to a hymn the text and tune of which were written in the late nineteenth century, right on the beginning of the last quarter of the late nineteenth century, 1875.

But as we were talking off-air before we came on, the text and tune to this hymn probably didn't become popular in the United States until the 1950's through the Billy Graham Crusades. And I'm talking about — and this may surprise a lot of people, because my guess is there will be a lot of people here who have been singing this hymn all of their life and they can't imagine a time when it wasn't popular — it's the hymn *To God Be the Glory*. It's a very famous Fanny Crosby hymn, but I'm told by the experts that it didn't catch on until Ira Sankey started using it in the Dwight Moody Crusades in Britain, and so it caught on in Britain first, and then when Billy Graham started using it in his Crusades in the 1950's, it caught on in America. Bill Wymond, you were telling us (and you can elaborate on this later) that you can remember it catching on as a young man in Louisville, Kentucky, when Billy Graham was doing his Crusades.

Dr. Wymond: And I suspect that Billy Graham ran into it in Britain perhaps, because he had his early '50's Crusades there, and maybe that's where he heard it.

Dr. Duncan: Bill, there will be so many people who immediately know when I say *To God Be the Glory* what tune we're talking about, but let's go ahead and play

the hymn for them, and then everybody will have it ringing in their ears as we talk about it. [*Dr. Wymond plays.*]

Bill, this is one of those...the tune in so many ways is typical of late nineteenth century, and I guess on our team I'm kind of the late nineteenth century curmudgeon and complain about late nineteenth century hymn tunes, but I actually like this hymn tune a lot. But maybe it would be helpful for you to talk a little bit about refrains and choruses, because late nineteenth century hymns really liked to use refrains and choruses. Surely there was a psychology behind that that was a part of the evangelical movement for using that. Maybe you could opine about that for a little bit.

Dr. Wymond: Well, I think that these are somewhat like certain folksongs, we could say, of the nineteenth century. They became the people's hymns, the folk hymns of the time, and choruses were a feature of them. They were more rhythmically active. They had a lot of dotted notes in them, just like this chorus...[plays]...not that there weren't dotted notes in earlier music, but certain kinds of dotted notes and choruses were one of the chief features of these. I think it was just a reinforcement of the simple idea of the hymn, that they would come back with a chorus and give an extra punch, as it were, with the main thought of the hymn.

This hymn is in s time, and you can't have a sad hymn (or it's hard to have a sad hymn!) in s time, because that's the dance rhythm, the waltz rhythm. And so immediately when you have a hymn in that meter you know that it's going to be a happy hymn.

And this starts off very joyfully [*plays*]...easy intervals... repetition... resolution... then exhortation: "Praise the Lord, praise the Lord..." And I don't need to continue on with that, but that's sort of the pattern to that hymn.

Dr. Duncan: One question comes into mind. I know in the case of Arthur Sullivan, in a number of his hymns that have choruses, it makes sense that a man who wrote songs for little operettas that had choruses that would have a chorus feature; it also strikes me though, that in the United States you see the same tendency in the late nineteenth century. A lot of people that were using the feature of verse followed by refrain or repeated chorus probably would not have encouraged people to go to the theater or to go hear those things either; and yet, there seems to be a musical influence of a style that was common in the popular culture on the church culture. I may be totally wrong in that supposition, but I just find that interesting.

Dr. Wymond: I think you're right. If you think about the Stephen Foster songs, the secular songs of the earlier time of the nineteenth century, there are parallels musically. A lot of the folks who wrote these tunes were on the frontier in America. They were not in New York or Boston so much — even though the poet

here was. But the musicians were out in Ohio and Kentucky and places like that where the music wouldn't have been as sophisticated.

Dr. Duncan: You know we could talk about Fanny Crosby until the cows come home, and we may have the opportunity to do that today, but I wanted to ask Derek something because this hymn captures one of the things that I know that you really like about late nineteenth century hymnody, and I am in entire agreement with you about it, and that is there is a joy and an exuberance about salvation and Christian experience that just exudes in the text of this song. And the melody, the tune itself sort of catches that. There's a deep gratitude for the saving grace of God to us; there's an almost direct quotation of John 3:16; it emphasizes sort of the experiential response of the soul to the mercy of God.

Derek, talk about why you think that's important in the late nineteenth century hymns and why it's something that we maybe miss out on today in some of the emphases that we get maybe in the more Reformed community.

Dr. Thomas: Well, we talked on a previous occasion (I imagine several previous occasions) about the importance of singing the Psalms. And one of the things you get when singing the Psalms is you get the whole gamut of Christian affections and states of mind and states of heart and soul, so great joy and great sorrow.

One of the features I think of late nineteenth century hymns is that they do tend to be upbeat and joyful and full of assurance. Now that can be a good thing, and it can also be a bad thing. I do think that the expectation of the New Testament is that one ought to have assurance; and I want to add a quick rider to the fact that true believers can lose assurance, and I think that our worship must occasionally reflect that so that somebody who comes to worship who, because of circumstances or trials, may not have the kind of assurance that this particular song reflects. You don't want that person to go away thinking they may not be believers. I think that worship has to be careful to have an all round addressing of Christian affections.

I don't know if that's where you wanted me to go, but I wouldn't want to sing this kind of hymn every day exclusively. It would be like having dessert for morning breakfast, dinner, and supper — which would be OK for me for a while, because I do love desserts and have been known at church suppers to eat the dessert first! But you know, one just loves this hymn not only because of its upbeat and very singable tune.

I actually do like on occasion the use of these choruses. I've been thinking as you two have been talking about the importance of on occasion singing choruses, because you don't have to think quite so hard about a chorus (because you know the words so well) and you can actually give it...it can actually minister to you in a way that sometimes when you're concentrating on what the next word is, you're

not able to.

Dr. Duncan: And you can find it sticking in your ears hours and hours later. You know, you'll be walking down the hall and suddenly that chorus will be ringing in your ears and then you'll sort of listen to it and think about the words.

Dr. Wymond: You know, the composer of this tune, William Doane, composed another hymn that is assurance related that we know very well: *I Am Thine, O Lord*. Kind of the same rhythm... [plays]...

Dr. Thomas: And that's a Fanny Crosby....

Dr. Wymond: Yes. So he wrote *Rescue the Perishing*, he wrote *Near the Cross* [you hear the lilt in that], and *More Love to Thee, O Christ*... [it's a little bit more sober tune there, but anyway...]

He wrote over two thousand tunes. And I was just thinking as you were talking also about the fact that America was just not sophisticated musically. They were on the East coast somewhat, as I said, but generally there had not been music education in America. So the level of the musical understanding was not as sophisticated as it would have been in Great Britain during the same time, for instance.

Dr. Thomas: There's something to be said in worship.... We sang on Sunday morning, last Sunday morning, a hymn — I think it was the opening hymn — where I didn't need the hymnbook, I knew the words so well. I love being able to sing without a hymnbook. You just know it and you enter into the spirit of the hymn in a way that...

Dr. Wymond: [Plays "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"]

Dr. Duncan and Dr. Thomas: That's what it was!

Dr. Duncan: I agree with you one hundred percent.

Dr. Thomas: And occasionally with a hymn like this, one knows this hymn so well and knows the words of this hymn so well you don't need a hymnbook.

Dr. Duncan: Jim Boice had virtually memorized all the hymns that they sang at Tenth Pres, and whenever R.C. Sproul was there, if R.C. sneaked a peek at the hymnal, Jim would nudge him and wink at him and sort of tease him about it because R.C. has a prodigious memory!

But Jim Boice sang everything...he would hold his hymnal in his hand with his finger at the place in the hymnal where the hymn tune is, and sort of rock back and forth on his feet with the hymnbook down to his side. But he would sing it

with exuberance. I don't know whether he was a very good singer at all, but he loved to sing and he had the words memorized. And it is a great blessing to know the words by heart of the songs that you are singing.

I want to ask you something about the first line, Derek, because we were talking about this off-air. It may take us a few moments to tease it out. The editors of *The Trinity Hymnal*, wanting to be good Calvinists and wanting not to be accused of opening the door for a universal doctrine of the atonement, changed a word in the opening stanza to:

“To God be the glory, great things He has done!
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life-gate....”

And then everybody who's out there in the listening audience is waiting for the final line. You know what it is: “That *all* may go in.” But that's not the way it's written in *The Trinity Hymnal*. It's changed to “that *we* may go in.” Now Derek, you have an opinion about that, and I think I share it. So go ahead, spill the beans! [*Laughter*]

Dr. Thomas: Well, first of all, now when I sing this hymn I try to close my eyes on that line because I'm tempted to look around and see who's singing “all” and who's singing “we”! [*Laughter*] And I guess for those listeners who don't sing this from *The Trinity Hymnal*, they may not even know that this edition of this hymn actually exists. And of course part of the problem for Calvinists is the doctrine of limited atonement, or particular redemption: that Christ died not for everybody, but that atonement was made for the elect and for the elect only. Now you either accept that doctrine or you don't, but assuming that one does accept that doctrine (and I do, and I do so unapologetically), I have a suspicion that the editors would also have edited John 3:16! [*Laughter*] Because after all it does say “God so loved the world that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” God so loved the world.

Dr. Wymond: Okay, Derek! Let me interrupt you just a minute! You said that Christ died for the elect. Why do you say that, and what's the benefit of understanding that, just in a word?

Dr. Thomas: Well, one argument would be double jeopardy, or double justice: that if Jesus died and by His death propitiated the sins of every single human being that ever was or shall be, bore the covenant anathema of God and retribution that that sin deserves (which is what we mean when we say that Jesus died on the cross for me), if He died for every single individual that ever was and ever shall be — myself, you, Hitler, Mussolini, Idi Amin, Pol Pot, whoever — then if the unbeliever is judged for his sins on the Day of Judgment, as we believe he will be, that sin is being punished twice. It's already been

punished at the cross; it's also going to be punished at the Day of Judgment, and you have the classic case of double jeopardy, of double justice.

Dr. Duncan: Let me say this. I think that both of you... Our interest in this, however, is not to try and indoctrinate our non-Calvinistic friends into our particular view of things here as much as to actually explain something that we don't want to convey. And I think a lot of our non-Calvinistic friends might hear us singing "that we may go in" and think that we think there are going to be fewer people in heaven than all those who believe in Christ.

I think it's very important for us to state as Calvinists that we believe that every last individual who has ever lived, lives now, and will ever live, who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ is going to be in heaven, whether their theological views are exactly the same as ours on the doctrine of the atonement or not.

Dr. Thomas: I like to say to my students at the seminary that exactly the same number are saved by the Calvinistic scheme as there are by the Arminian scheme.

Dr. Duncan: Yes. And that means that this discussion for Calvinists is about the issue of what Christ's death accomplished. Did it make people "saveable", or did it actually save people? So it's not about getting fewer people saved; it's about helping those who are saved understand the complete sufficiency of Christ's death to accomplish their salvation.

Dr. Thomas: And the editing here actually shifts the meaning, I think, significantly, and I think shifts the meaning of John 3:16 significantly.

Dr. Duncan: Right.

Dr. Thomas: Now, my understanding of John 3:16 is that God so loved the world — namely, in a sense He loves everybody to some degree. He loves some savingly and others He does not. He loves all kinds of people. There is no ethnic divide. Let me just take that as an issue, and that's a very, very important issue for us in Jackson, Mississippi. And to be able to say the gospel is for Caucasians, it's for African-Americans, it's for Latin Americans, it's for the Chinese...every people group, every ethnicity...God loves the world in that sense, and "opened the life-gate" that all kinds of people may go in. And it's an evangelistic statement.

Dr. Duncan: Yes, and in the context of the New Testament it was a revolutionary declaration in the context of Jewish particularism where there would have been very many devout Jewish people who believed that it was necessary to be a Jew in order to be saved. And the New Testament declaration is invariably that whether you are Jew or Greek or slave or free or male or female, if your trust is in Jesus Christ you are saved.

Dr. Thomas: Well, the refrain as the editors have done it doesn't quite fit, because the refrain is going to say: "Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear His voice" whereas I've just been saying 'Thank You, Lord, for saving me'.... 'let the earth then rejoice!' And rather I think what the poem is saying is God loves all kinds of people in all the world.

Dr. Duncan: And there's a missionary intent to it, isn't there? Our hearts are to be enlarged and to desire the whole world to come to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Dr. Thomas: ...so that this is a great missionary hymn as originally written.

Dr. Duncan: Yes. And let's just say that the best of Calvinists over time have had a very big missionary heart, a heart for the world. In fact, the modern missionary movement in the English-speaking world began with Calvinistic Baptists and Calvinistic Anglicans and Calvinistic Presbyterians sending their sons and daughters off to Africa and India to die.

Dr. Thomas: And actually, in my naughtier moments when I've been standing next to somebody whose Reformed and Calvinistic credentials are unquestionable, have loved to sing "all" right there! [*Laughter*] But it's a great hymn.

Dr. Duncan: Let's walk through the rest of the stanzas, because even as it opens on this very happy note of praising God and giving Him glory for the salvation that He has accomplished through the atoning work of Jesus Christ — and isn't it wonderful to have a hymn that's glorying in the atoning work of Christ!

We have so many Christians even who call themselves evangelicals today that don't like us to talk about the doctrine of the atonement. Here's a hymn that's just exuberant in its praise to God for the doctrine of the atonement.

And then in the second stanza, that's only elaborated:

"O perfect redemption! The purchase of blood!
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus forgiveness receives."

That's a line that every Calvinist has absolutely no reservation about affirming, and that again is I think another reason why you're going to have to change the "all" to the "we" in the first stanza. That second stanza says everything that a Calvinist wants to say. Derek?

Dr. Thomas: Well, I think it's so important to emphasize — perhaps in our circles, particularly — the doctrine of regeneration, the doctrine of being born

again, the doctrine that in believing in Jesus "...that moment from Jesus forgiveness receives." The absolute need to exercise faith in Jesus Christ: I think that's important to preach and I think that's important to sing about.

Dr. Duncan: Yes. And then, the final stanza I think so appropriately culminating with the affirmation that as great as these things are, as great as the things are that God has taught us, as great as the things are that He has done, as great as our rejoicing is in Jesus Christ the Son, there will be something greater. And that is when we see Jesus.

Dr. Thomas: Well, again the redactor has been present! The editor has been present, because the original said, "And purer and higher and greater will be our wonder our rapture when Jesus we see." And the editor has changed *rapture* to *transport*. Perhaps you can elaborate on that.

Dr. Duncan: Then again, this is sort of a...you might call it a malapropism, or you might just call it a *double entendre*, that the term *rapture* certainly has been associated in Presbyterian circles in the twentieth century with a view of theology that teaches that there's going to be a secret rapture of the saints before the millennium begins. Now Fanny Crosby had no intention whatsoever of...

Dr. Thomas: Actually I remember Professor John Murray, whose Reformed credentials are impeccable, I remember him at a Banner of Truth Conference in Leicester in England saying about this very word *rapture* here, that it was a perfectly good word.

Dr. Duncan: A perfectly good word, and it is. But I think that was just to remove potential offense from the Reformed ilk in the congregation singing this. Well, enough talk about this great hymn. Bill Wymond, let's hear *To God Be the Glory*.

To God be the glory, great things He has done!
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life-gate that we may go in.

REFRAIN:

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear His voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father through Jesus the Son,
And give Him the glory, great things He has done!"

O perfect redemption! The purchase of blood!
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus forgiveness receives.

[REFRAIN]

Great things He has taught us, great things He has done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer and higher and greater will be
Our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.

[REFRAIN]

Dr. Wymond: We have heard Victor Smith singing *To God Be the Glory*. This has been “Hymns of the Faith,” brought to you by Jackson's First Presbyterian Church.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.

Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, **subscriptions are free**. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).