

Sermon to the Saints of God at Westboro Baptist Church

October 4, 2015

Near the White House in Washington, D.C. sits the Willard Hotel. I have been there. It's a beautiful, ornate old structure that has been the site of many significant gatherings throughout most of this nation's history.

In November, 1861 – about six months after the Civil War began -- Julia Ward Howe was staying at the Willard. Julia was the 4th of 7 children born to Samuel Ward, III and his wife who was also named Julia. Samuel was a well-to-do banker and a strict Calvinist. Julia (the author) married Samuel Howe, a physician, and they had six children.



Julia Ward Howe

Julia Ward Howe was in D.C. that November, along with her husband, to visit Abraham Lincoln in the White House. She was an active abolitionist, women's suffragist and poet and like most Americans at that time had a severe interest in the Civil War and related activities. While in Washington, a friend of hers suggested she write a song that could be sung to a then-popular tune called *John Brown's Body* – a suggestion she contemplated. Actually, that tune had been borrowed from an old Methodist hymn, "Say, Brothers, Will You Meet Us", by William Steffe, the lyrics of which appear at the end of this sermon.

On the night of November 18, 1861 Julia awoke from her sleep at the Willard Hotel with the words of a new song running through her mind. I don't know about you good people, but I certainly have had similar experiences in my life – not new songs but thoughts and words that are running in my head. Mrs. Howe, on that occasion, did just what I have often done. She jumped up out of bed and wrote the words down on paper while fresh. Years later, she recalled –

I went to bed that night as usual, and slept, according to my wont, quite soundly. I awoke in the gray of the morning twilight; and as I lay waiting for the dawn, the long lines of the desired poem began to twine themselves in my mind. Having thought out all the stanzas, I said to myself, 'I must get up and write these verses down, lest I fall asleep again and forget them.' So, with a sudden effort, I sprang out of bed, and found in the dimness an old stump of a pen which I remembered to have used the day before. I scrawled the verses almost without looking at the paper.

The resulting song was the well-known *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, a patriotic masterpiece. A recent article appearing on the Christian Broadcasting Network had this to say about this battle hymn:

Mrs. Howe's hymn has been acclaimed through the years as one of our finest patriotic songs. At one time it was sung as a solo at a large rally attended by President Abraham Lincoln. After the audience had responded with loud applause, the President, with tears in his eyes, cried out, "Sing it again!" It was sung again. And after more than a hundred years, Americans still join often in proclaiming, "Glory! Hallelujah! His truth is marching on!"

I mention the popularity and patriotic nature of this song to make this point: The enemies of the cross with whom we deal on a daily basis call us extremists and kooks and mock our message, while at the same time relishing this old hymn as a great American anthem. And get this! That beautiful old hymn confirms our gospel message in many respects. So one has to ask: Do these modern-day citizens of America listen to what they sing; do they pay attention to what they read? Believe me, there is no "God Loves Everybody" in *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*.

No “God loves the sinner but hates the sin” lurks in the lyrics of that old-time song.

So, what we have here is another example of these Bible-ignorant fellow residents who lie in the lap of that great Liar, their Father the Devil, while gospel truth surrounds them and is part of their lexicon -- a beautiful example of God blinding their eyes and hardening their hearts.

Let’s take a closer look at this old hymn that Americans love to sing but obviously have no concept of what it is saying. The lyrics we most popularly hear are these:

1. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; he hath loosed the fateful lightening of His terrible swift sword -- His truth is marching on.
2. I have seen Him in the watchfires of a hundred circling camps, They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps; I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps -- His day is marching on.
3. He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never sound retreat, He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat; O be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant, my feet -- Our God is marching on.
4. In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea, With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me; As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free, While God is marching on.

REFRAIN: Glory, glory, hallelujah! Glory, glory, hallelujah! Glory, glory, hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.

Additionally, there is one other verse not usually heard in modern performances, as follows:

He is coming like the glory of the morning on the wave,
He is Wisdom to the mighty, He is Succour to the brave,
So the world shall be His footstool, and the soul of Time His slave,
Our God is marching on.

These lyrics contain strong Biblical content, very applicable to these last days, such as –

“Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.” God finds glory in his righteous judgments upon sinful men. **For I will send into her pestilence, and blood into her streets; and the wounded shall be judged in the midst of her by the sword upon her on every side; and they shall know that I am the Lord. (Ezekiel 28:23).** Add to this Nahum’s vision: **Who can stand before his indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him. (Nahum 1:6).**

And we see this more clearly in the Revelation, where God continually sees his earth-judgments giving him glory. **Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. (Revelation 14:7).** And these beautiful words that we know so well: **And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: (Revelation 19:2).**

So, as I say, while our opponents insist God loves one and all, without condition – do they not insist he’s a “come as you are” God – they sing of his glorious judgments on fallen, unrepentant man.

“He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.” My-my-my; what have we here? Trampling out the vintage; grapes of wrath -- that sounds a bit judgmental to me. In fact, that smacks of a Man of War God who vindicates his people and renders recompense to those who disobey. Amazingly, these people sing of God’s most terrible judgments, while asserting these bad things happening almost daily are out of God’s hands and he has nothing to do with them. But the words – they are beautiful and Biblical. **And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the**

earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs. (Revelation 14:18-20). We find more of this trampling in Revelation 19 where Christ is described as being **clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and his name is called The Word of God.** (Revelation 19:13). And in Joel we see a picture of God trampling out the grapes of sin in vats that are full! **Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great.** (Joel 3:13). Malachi described such a time: **But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap.** (Malachi 3:2).

This is what we preach here at WBC; this is what the Bible clearly says; and this is what those living all around us proudly sing! So why the anger at our words, my fellow Americans? When we tell you that God is punishing you early and often for your proud sins and your filthy rebellion, what provokes your vile reactions? You know we speak the gospel truth; you sing it all the time.

And there's more. "He hath loosed the fateful lightening of His terrible swift sword." These words practically scream the Revelation. Rev. 1:16 – **[O]ut of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.** Rev. 2:12 - **And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.** Rev. 2:16 - **Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.** Rev. 19:15 - **And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations.** Not to mention Hebrews 4:12 – **For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**

That brings us to the end of the first verse of this famous hymn. Most performances of this song these days end after the first verse, given the lightness of modern society. But there's plenty there in that single opening verse for any sincere soul.

Time and attention span limitations suggest I not address all of the remaining four verses. However, some of what remains deserve some additional attention.

From the 2nd verse: "I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps." What might that be referring to? Well, likely the story found in Daniel Chapter 5 where in the midst of drunken revelry involving the **golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God** the **fingers of a man's hand** wrote God's judgment on the wall. These words of judgment were lit to the reader by the flickering of **the candlestick**. The king was so scared by what he saw that his **knees smote one against another**. (**Daniel 5:4-6**). The picture is one of perfect judgment and Oh that the kings of this nation had such a God-fearing reaction. I say, divine judgment and the fear of God; America sings of it but doesn't believe a word.

That 2nd verse ends like this: "His day is marching on." Those lyrics refer to the proper timing of God's judgments, requiring watchfulness and sober thoughts. **[A] wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment. Because to every purpose there is time and judgment...."** (**Ecclesiastes 8:5-6**).

Lyrics from the 3rd verse take us immediately to the **great white throne** in Revelation 20: "He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat." There are few things more anathema to modern day America than the very thought of a final judgment; yet, they sing of it in their national hymn. We constantly speak of it; in reaction, they ridicule the very notion. Yes indeed, their own words of national song speak to the **great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away**; a time when the dead shall be judged **according to their works**. (**Revelation 20:11-13**).

And here's a kicker. Verse 3 goes on to recognize that the feet of those who bring the **good tidings** of the Bible gospel – that is those that **publisheth salvation** -- are **beautiful upon the mountains**. (**Isaiah 52:7**). Listen to these words from verse 3: "Be jubilant, my feet." What in the world do they think those words are all about when they sing them in their music halls?

Verse 4 of this country's national hymn opens with these stirring words: "In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea." These lyrics take us directly to Song of Solomon 2:1: **I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys**. That word translated "lily" is *shoshanath* and appears 7 times in the Song (it also appears in the headings of Psalms 45, 60, 69 and 80). It depicts a brilliantly colored and fragrant flower. All of this speaks to the beautiful, fragrant and fruitful nature of Christ and his church. Gill speaks to this:

The church may also be compared to a "lily of the valleys", This is a very beautiful flower; Pliny says it is next in nobleness to the rose; its whiteness is singularly excellent; no plant more fruitful, and no flower exceeds it in height; in some countries, it rises up three cubits high; has a weak neck or body, insufficient to bear the weight of its head. The church may be compared to a lily, for her beauty and fragrance, as to a rose; and the redness of the rose, and the whiteness of the lily, meeting in her, make her somewhat like her beloved, white and ruddy; like the lily, being arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, the righteousness of the saints; and like it for fruitfulness, as it is in good works, under the influence of divine grace, and grows up on high into her head, Christ Jesus; and though weak in herself, yet strong in him, who supports her, and not she him: and the church may be compared to a "lily of the valleys"; which may not describe any particular lily, and what we now call so; but only expresses the place where it grows, in low places, where plants are in danger of being plucked and trodden upon; though they may have more moisture and verdure than those in higher places; so the church of Christ is sometimes in a low estate, exposed to enemies, and liable to be trampled and trodden under foot by them, and to be carried away with the flood of persecution, were it not guarded by divine power; and, being watered with the dews of grace, it becomes flourishing and fruitful.

MISCELLANEOUS—OLD MELODIES.

1179

WELCOME HOME.

ARRANGED.

1. See, brethren, see how the day rolls on, Quick-ly will the Sav- iour come; Hark! hear the sound, "he will ap- pear,"

Chorus.

Sweet-ly falls up- on the ear. Then haste, let us work till the day- light is o'er, Our hearts fill'd with love as we

row to the shore; Our earth-ly la- bor be- ing done, How sweet the Christian's welcome home! Home, home, home, the

Christian's welcome home; Sweet, O sweet the Christian's welcome home, Welcome home, welcome home, Welcome home.

- 2 Lift up your heads, and rejoice in God;
Shout his praises all abroad;
Soon shall we hear the voice, "'Tis done;
Child, your Father calls; come home."
3 Come, sinners, come, let us all awake!
And the Spirit's truths partake;

- Soon will appear, and O how bright!
Prayer to praise and faith to sight.
4 Hail, brethren, hail! it's the new-born year;
Michael's trump we soon shall hear,
Then will the saints and angels sing,
"Glory be to heaven's King." *Anon.*

1180

WILL YOU MEET US?

SLAVE MELODY.

1. { Say, broth-ers, will you meet us? Say, broth-ers, will you meet us? } On Canaan's hap- py shore?
(omit.)

- 2 Say, sisters, will you meet us?
Say, sisters, will you meet us?
Say, sisters, will you meet us
On Canaan's happy shore?
3 By the grace of God we'll meet you,
By the grace of God we'll meet you,
By the grace of God we'll meet you,
On Canaan's happy shore.

- 4 That will be a happy meeting,
That will be a happy meeting,
That will be a happy meeting
On Canaan's happy shore.
5 Jesus lives and reigns forever,
Jesus lives and reigns forever,
Jesus lives and reigns forever
On Canaan's happy shore.