

12/12/2021 - "Listen to the Gospel!"

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Date: 12 December 2021

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[0 : 00] So we're gonna continue in our series in the, I almost said Gospel of John, in the melody of the gospel. And we're gonna be continuing to look, just as Peter introduced you to, of just different things that we sing and not taking those songs and melodies for granted as they're just mindless sort of, you know, you just sing along.

I sing songs throughout the day. You can ask my wife, and I don't even realize I'm singing them. And often these Christmas songs, it's usually joy to the world that I'm singing all year round and not just the Christmas season.

And amen, all right, good. All right, first amen this morning. Wasn't anticipating that. Wrong lyrics to the songs majority of the time. Usually what it sounds like, I sing and that's it.

So, but that even reinforces my point further because sometimes we just sing these songs mindlessly. Sometimes with the wrong lyrics. And taking a moment to look at what these songs are teaching, allowing the songs to capture different aspects of theology and doctrine that are found within the scriptures here.

So today we're gonna be looking at one of the, arguably one of the most popular Christmas hymns that everyone knows so well, Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

[1 : 24] And I've titled the sermon today, Listen to the Gospel. And there's not many songs that can compete, in my opinion.

We can debate later after the church service. For its fame. There's not many songs that can compete for its fame. This is one of the 6,500 hymns that were written by Charles Wesley. One of the 6,500. And if one thing is for certain, looking at Charles Wesley's writing, if you're singing a Charles Wesley song, you're more than likely singing the gospel or some aspect of the gospel. And this hymn offers a foundational survey of theology as well. And we could probably create a series in and of itself.

We could go back to the first day, the first week of Advent, starting with Hark the Herald Angels Sing, because each and every stanza is packed so richly with theology. And within this hymn, we see many names attributed to Jesus Christ, such as King, Lord, Prince of Peace, Son of Righteousness, Everlasting Lord, Desire of Nations, Incarnate Deity, and Emmanuel.

[2 : 52] And today, we're going to be diving into the themes that this hymn presents, specifically dealing with Christology, the study of Jesus Christ. So, Tereology, the study of salvation, and Eschatology, the study of the end times, of what is laying ahead.

And so, each of these stanzas, there's four stanzas, but I'm going to condense the last stanza, kind of like Whitefield did to this hymn. He kind of came in and condensed all this stuff from Charles Wesley.

And so, I'm going to pull a Whitefield on this hymn today and condense the last four stanzas into one section. But each stanza of this hymn, each four stanzas, reveal great portions and significant portions of the gospel.

So, I invite you to pray with me this morning as we dive in and look upon this hymn. But more importantly, look at the authority, the inspired holy word of God and the sufficient word of God this morning and see what it's saying to us and how God is interacting with us according to what this hymn speaks.

Let's pray. Father, we come to you today and we ask you for help by the power of the Holy Spirit within all of our lives. Father, open our hearts to your word.

[4 : 08] Challenge us through the message today as several challenges in our lives will be posed. Father, help this Christmas season be unique in every person's life in this church, not just a yearly ritual, a time where all of a sudden we're thinking about Jesus because everything's decorated and

we're constantly reminded.

But let this carry and be a unique season that propels us into a life of even the most ordinary days. We praise God and we praise as if there's lights and everything strung around for all to see and a reminder to us of the glory of God.

So Father, help us at this time to look at this time as unique and Father, we pray that you speak to us through your word. Challenge us. We praise in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. So the first section going on, hearing the gospel, the first section, and we'll be looking at the first stanza a minute.

And I just remembered, I had an idea of putting actually the lyrics on the screen, but I'm gonna actually say the lyrics of the hymn. I forgot to put it up on the screen for everyone today.

[5 : 28] But we will be singing it after the sermon. But the first section is give ear to the good news. Give ear to the good news. The truth revolving around Christmas is centered entirely upon the hope of God sending a Messiah to redeem humanity from the curse of sin.

And while that sounds just like an ordinary, every church is talking about it at this time, this should never become dry, stale, and dead upon our ears.

This is not just your breaking news headline on our news channels or a headline on the newspaper that we kind of like affirm with our minds and like, oh, there's breaking news again.

This is something that we should, this should change our perspectives. It should change and shift the direction of our lives, the yearnings of our hearts.

This is the hope of the world. This is the hope of the world. The best news imaginable. That is the inner cry of all humanity's soul that longs to be united with its creator.

[6 : 52] This is Christmas. This hymn starts out, Hark the herald angels sing. Hark. You might catch me running around now after studying this and thinking about old English.

I'm gonna be saying, Hark! Hark, kids! Hark! Right? Because it means listen. And it's an old English term, right? It's used to draw attention to an ill-advised or foolish remark, disposition of sorts.

And it even evokes attention to something of the past. Hark! You know if your parents, every parent I believe knows that there's a difference between your kids hearing and your kids listening.

Maybe you're that troubled child here sitting in the room. There's a very vast difference between hearing something and listening.

Hearing is something that's sort of attained at an arm's distance. It's impersonal to hear something. You can hear the reverberation of a larynx marching orders to get their chores done, clean their rooms for the 20th time in the day.

[8 : 08] Trust me, I was that problem child. God bless my parents. But we also see that when we're saying listen, this is calling for something personal.

That when you listen, that means that you have not only heard, you have taken what you've heard, you've digested it, and all of a sudden, since you have listened, you are now accountable.

There's accountability to it. It's personal. And it's something that calls for action. It's something that calls for obedience and discipline. And this verse says, hark, the herald angels sing.

Listen to the heralding angels sing. Take what they're singing and hold it so personal to you.

Glory to the newborn king. Peace on earth and mercy mild. God and sinner reconciled. The call of the gospel is personal.

[9 : 22] Not merely hearing the vibrations of a larynx, of Brent up there week after week after week, just vibrating off into the deep unknown of the sanctuary, filling up every corner, and we hear, but listening to hope.

Listen. Listen. Listen to the gospel that heaven declares through this newborn king, bringing peace on earth and mercy where God and sinners are reconciled.

Looking into various resources of this song, John Piper, I stumbled upon John Piper actually commenting on this song, and John says it right usually every time, and usually once you've read one John Piper book, you've read them all.

That's the stigma with John Piper. He even admits it. So the first, he says the first verse isn't theologically textured. It's pretty much straight in your face, black and white, but while it's not theologically textured, it is a rousing invitation.

It is a rousing invitation to all nations and all nature to join with singing angels in celebrating the arrival of God's long-promised Messiah.

[10:41] This is something that we see in Romans 5, 1, where it says, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We don't have peace with God by doing good things in life and being a good person by our own selfish definitions of what good means.

We have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord Jesus Christ, and through him, we have also obtained access by faith, faith, church, into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

And the hymn continues, joyful all ye nations, rise. Join the triumph of the skies.

With the angelic hosts proclaim, Christ is born in Bethlehem. Christmas is about God's heavenly declaration of war upon sin.

[12:01] That God is coming into sin, and he's doing something about it that was long promised in the garden, which we'll look at in the third section.

That God, just as we spoke over the past couple weeks, God used the gentle, the lowly road to inaugurate and reveal his power and mighty promise to creation to redeem that which the fall has broken.

And church, similar to the call of this hymn, as this is not only inviting the half-awoken church member in Steel Valley Church this morning to join with the heavenly choir, this is extending that to even rocks crying out the glory of God.

I invite you to listen just as all creation has listened. Whether this is your first time with us or your 500th time with us, are you listening this morning?

And better yet, does your faith in your life reveal that you are a listener? I don't want to step on toes, but we have to challenge ourselves.

[13:26] Are we being set apart in this life because we're actually hearing the gospel? Do the things that you have in life, do the things that you value in life reveal that you listen?

Would your spouse, would your family, would your neighbor attest that you listen to the gospel? Listen this morning.

The gospel, it changes everything. And it begins with God coming to wretched sinners to reconcile us to a holy and righteous God.

This is personal and calls for a new way of living, a new way of thinking, working, planning. The gospel of reconciliation through Jesus Christ changes everything.

Listen this morning. We're going to continue in the second stanza and I'm not going to give a big theological treatment on this. If you want to go into depth of different aspects I speak about, we can definitely do that.

[14:41] Or later in the week, my phone number is pretty much readily available. Just shoot me a text so we can grab a coffee. But we're going to look at what this song sings because it draws upon the mystery of the virgin birth.

And so, and just real quickly, we're going to hit on this because not only is the mystery of our minds sort of like, why would a holy, all-sufficient God who has eternally existed, the Alpha and the Omega, why would He come to this earth?

Why? We could sort of rest upon the mystery found within the why God would do that. But the looming curiosity of our minds, I believe, gets really hung up at the how this happened.

How did God come to us? Greek mythological movies or Greek mythological writings and books really don't help us understand this at all.

Because the incarnation of Jesus Christ was not some sexual scandal between this God who came and slept with Mary in the night and it was this big scandal of sorts.

[16:04] Those Greek mythological movies do not help what the Bible says about what took place and how beautiful it really was and how pure it was.

Because the Holy Spirit, being the third person of the Trinity, came. And the third person of the Trinity is the co-authority and equal of all the other persons of the Trinity.

And so the Holy Spirit, full divinity, encapsulated with that, was sent into the womb of Mary in order that the full divinity may receive full humanity.

And so he wouldn't have an earthly father and the child conceived would have no equally imputed sin of Adam.

This is extremely important because if this child was conceived by a human male, it would have the sinful mark of Adam as being a representative of the nation.

[17 : 12] And so God sent his Holy Spirit into the womb of Mary. A mystery it is. And Psalm 14, 1 through 3, talks about that sin problem, why this couldn't have been done any other way.

Psalm 14 says, none is righteous, no, not one. No one understands, no one seeks for God, all have turned aside, together they have become worthless.

no one does good, not even one. And as just of a man that Joseph was, as scripture indicates that he was a just man, so he chose to divorce her in quiet that night before the angel came to him, we see that there is no righteous.

If there's any righteousness apart from Christ that's attributed into our lives, it's selfish righteousness, self-attributed righteousness according to our standard, not God's standard.

And so God's word, the canon of scripture, the measuring stick of which we allow our lives to be evaluated from gives us the level, the approving righteousness that is according to not man, but God.

[18 : 33] And so this is true for all those conceived through humanity which by nature are sinful and rebellious against God. But not this seed, not this seed within Mary's womb.

This seed was imputed with righteousness, full divinity, and it was closed with humanity. And so the hymn that was written by Charles Wesley sings, Christ by heaven, by highest heaven adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord.

Late in time, behold, him come, offspring of the virgin's womb, veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity, pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.

Why did he do this? How did he do this? Galatians 4, 4-5 says, God sent forth his son to be born, born under the law to redeem those who are under the law, so that we might receive adoptions as sons.

A mystery it is. God sent his spirit into the womb of Mary so that God would send the spirit of his son into our hearts just as mysterious as it was the virgin birth.

[20 : 12] That when we receive Jesus Christ by our faith, we are promised to be sealed by the Holy Spirit. You want to talk about a mystery? That's another mystery. And the Holy Spirit came into our lives as well.

Mystery, yes. Truth, you bet your life upon it. is truth, regardless of the mystery. And we see the third section of this verse, and I've titled it The Promise of Christ.

And while we talk about peace, that was John Lennon's theme, it seemed, in all of his writings about just everyone getting along and not causing trouble, right?

You know, we could talk about that and just, you know, throw up our peace signs and everything, but if what the Bible says is true and if history reveals something that's true as well, peace really can't be obtained on this earth.

We can pray for world peace and everything, but it will never be found in this world today. But we can trust in a peace that is established between us and a holy God.

[21 : 33] There might not be peace horizontally all the time, but there's definitely peace vertically. And in our society today, we rely heavily upon legislation to usher in times of peace that obviously, if you look at history, are some broken by some bomb that goes off over here and then all of a sudden they're at war again and something happens.

We are all sinful, all have fallen short of God, no one looks for him. So what the Bible says is true, and true peace in a sinful world is never accomplished perfectly in this life.

I mean, even in the church today, we're some of the most screwed up folks around, and we claim to have the answer to how to be reconciled with the holy God, and we can barely reconcile sometimes with each other, right?

And we are sometimes the most chaotic assemblies, and all of a sudden disperse, and everybody's against each other, all while professing Christ.

But Jesus, the embodiment of absolute peace, peace unfathomable, peace unshakable, peace unbreakable, he is the object of peace, Isaiah 9, 6 says.

[22 : 48] And we see that this hymn that Wesley has written says this exact thing. Hail the heaven-born prince of peace.

Hail the son of righteousness. Think about that. Just as the son is a source of energy, of just a mystery of energy, it's just radiating an endless supply of energy.

Jesus Christ, the son of righteousness, he is an endless supply of righteousness just radiating from himself. And Wesley continues, light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings.

And think about this. It was through man's violence. peace. With the aim of achieving peace with the Roman Empire, Jesus was the problem causer on this earth.

So in aim of achieving peace with their Roman Empire so that they can still be established, they decided to exert violence upon the prince of peace.

[23 : 57] The true peace was marred by false peace. It was a complete facade of peace. The cross is a testimony of where true peace was marred by false peace, of men seeking peace on their own agendas.

And it was at the cross where Jesus laid aside his glory and allowed his humanity to be utterly ripped apart. A picture of the justice of a holy God punishing sin, a picture of mercy of a God, of God allowing a ransom to take our place.

And Wesley continues, mild he lays his glory by, born that man no more may die. Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.

Man, this third verse marvels at the sacrifice and the mission of God's son. Jesus laid aside the comforts of heaven, entered the sinful mess of the world, and literally was born to die as we spoke about last week, that no more may die.

He came to give his life as a ransom. And Piper actually says it perfectly. The extent of his descent is matched only by the ascent of grace that we find in him.

[25 : 20] And the mystery continues. The gospel accomplishes spiritual life now, giving us a new birth in Jesus Christ by the power and the mystery of the Holy Spirit through regeneration of our hearts.

And through that new birth, we are promised eternal life later. Spiritual life now through rebirth. New status, new nature, new aims, new passions, new yearnings in life.

And we're born. Born again. We have eternal life later. Born to raise the sons of the earth.

This is amazing grace. Can't put it any other way. This is amazing grace.

Grace that wages war upon our flesh. That provides us with not just cleaning us up, putting us through the car wash. Some of us with the touchless wash would do.

[26 : 26] Some of us need those heavy bristles digging into our flesh because we know we are messed up. But just going through this is not just a life improvement. Your life will improve as you are obedient to Christ.

And people will benefit from that as well. But that's not all it is. He tells us that he will give us a new heart, a new nature, grace that wages war upon our flesh.

This grace brings about a new nature, new status, a new standing with a holy, righteous God. God's grace is a testimony of his love that invites us to come.

And by his drawing power, his love effectually changes us despite of the condition of which we came. just as I read from Sinclair Ferguson just a moment ago.

And just as verse 4 beckons within that realm, it says, come, desire of nations, come. Fix in us thy humble home.

[27 : 37] Come, desire of nations, come. Fix us in thy humble home. This beckoning melody calls for those who must listen and who might listen to understand the weights of Jesus' mission.

And we see, rise the woman's conquering seed. Bruise in us the serpent's head. Adam's likeness now efface. Stamp thine image in its place.

Second Adam from above, reinstate us in thy love. Man, I wish I had the rest of the afternoon to just unpacked this. This is why I probably should have just stuck with this song through this entire Advent series.

But boy, you have two realms that you walk into in this hymn. You have this first realm of being a representative of Adam.

A representative of Adam. Genesis 3.15 talks about this representation. He says, God says, I will put enmity between you, the serpent, and the woman Eve, and between your offspring and her offspring.

[28 : 50] Then a promise is made. He, the seed of Eve, would bruise the serpent's head. And you shall bruise his heel.

So we have this representative, this ongoing generational representative of Adam. But Wesley keys in to something that's being replaced.

And that's being a representative of Christ. Romans 5.15 talks about this. And it says, for if many died through one man's trespass, Adam's trespass, how much more have the grace of God and the

free gift by the grace of that one man, Jesus Christ abounded for many.

For if, in verse 17, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, Adam, which more, much, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

And the hymn sings, Adam's likeness now effaced, a fancy word for erased. Adam's likeness now erased.

[30 : 14] Stamp thy image in its place. Second Adam from above reinstate us in thy love. Rise, conquering seed.

That's promised back in Genesis 3. Bruise the sin within all of us. Bruise the sin which is in all of us. Erase the mark of rebellion written upon all of our hearts.

Replace it. And seal, seal our second Adam, being sealed by the true Adam, Jesus Christ. And reverse the curse of sin.

Reinstate us in harmony with God. God, this is the gospel that we often miss during Christmas time. A mindless melody that we sing. It's all joyous and Brent sings it all year long, saying the wrong lyrics and everything like that, right? We're all victim of the same.

[31 : 20] Trust me. How sad this can be to miss such rich theology within this Christmas hymn. This makes me just want to cry out, come, Lord Jesus, come.

The weight and the gravity of what Jesus Christ has accomplished on this earth for each and every person who is awake or maybe sleeping in this room this morning, it is for you.

For you. I'm going to do something different this morning. I'd like the worship team to just come up and get ready. I'm just going to read a section of scripture that is a little bit lengthy.

And just so we, I want them to come up just so we don't have any distractions as we close today and land the plane per se this morning.

We're promised in Revelation that the one who rested within a small wooden manger would die upon a massive wooden cross.

[32 : 37] And he not only came, but he is coming again. This is something that we see in Revelation 7 in verse 13 where it says, Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, this is John writing, Who are these clothed in white robes and from where have they come?

And John replied, Sir, you know. And he said, said to him, These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. And he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. The sun shall not strike them nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd.

And he will guide them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

[33 : 58] This is great hope that began in a manger that we see fulfilled upon the cross. But the story is not over yet.

There is great eschatological hope laying ahead of a future resurrection of God's people who are being gathered by the Lamb of God.

And this is undeniable. Scripture speaks of this. Quoting in Daniel 12 and Revelation 20, the dust of the earth and in the sea, awakening at the call of Jesus Christ.

At the sound of his voice, all alive, all dead, will be resurrected and risen at that time. Some to eternal life into an inheritance that lays waiting ahead, but some to eternal punishment.

This Christmas, according to the measure of your faith, what destination awaits you today, right now. If there's any uncertainty or if you want to give your life to Jesus Christ this morning, simply come up and pray with me and I can help you through that.

[35 : 19] But don't let this Christmas pass you by as just another year in church singing hymns and singing songs. Let us celebrate Christ's life and death this morning.

Let's pray. Thank you.