

Then Sings My Soul: How Great Thou Art!

Meditation #1 Then Sings My Soul: How Great Thou Art for Thy Power Displayed!

God's Word from Psalm 77:11-20: ¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. ¹² I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds." ¹³ Your ways, God, are holy. What god is as great as our God? ¹⁴ You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. ¹⁵ With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. ¹⁶ The waters saw you, God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed. ¹⁷ The clouds poured down water, the heavens resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth. ¹⁸ Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. ¹⁹ Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. ²⁰ You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Imagine if you had lived through the Israelite's exodus from Egypt. You've witnessed firsthand the 10 plagues and what they did to the Egyptians. You were with the people when you came to the Red Sea, watching the waters writhe, the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night – the Lord God leading the charge and being your rear guard. Then to see the mighty waters split, to pass by on dry ground – not soggy or muddy ground, but dry, to be able to reach out and touch those waters stacked up on each side. Then, safely on the other side, you saw those waters come crashing down on the Egyptians, wiping them away. What an amazing display of God's power!

We were not there, but God recorded this story so that we would know and marvel at his delivering power. We may not have been there, but we have plenty of displays of God's power in our day. Take just one example: a thunderstorm. I love watching a thunderstorm. Each flash of light that illuminates the dark sky and earth. Each successive rumble of thunder rattling through the earth. It is power that I cannot harness but that I get to simply stand in awe of.

It was after a thunderstorm that Carl Boberg got the inspiration to pen the poem *O Great God*. He observed with wonder how the lightning crashed and thunder resounded. The wind blew, billowing the fields of grain. The rain pelted the earth. And just as quickly as it started, it ended. There were clear skies and the tolling of church bells. God's power was on display. About 50 years later, an English missionary named Stuart Hine translated the poem, tweaked the music, and came up with the hymn we know today.

Next time you get a chance to marvel at a thunderstorm, take it. Remember whose hand formed it. Remember what awesome power he has. If he can make a thunderstorm, how much more can he do for you and me? God, your hand still displays powerful acts. Our souls sing: My God, how great thou art for thy power displayed!

We sing stanza 1 of Hymn 256.

Meditation #2 Then Sings My Soul: How Great Thou Art for Lofty Mountain Grandeur!

God's Word from Micah 4:1-5: ¹ In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. ² Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ³ He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. ⁴ Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken. ⁵ All the nations may walk in the name of their gods, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.

When you pull up here to Light of the Valley, you can't help but take in the view from the parking lot. The Wasatch mountains reach up in grandiose fashion, horses frolic in the fields. It is truly awesome. We've got to have some of the prettiest scenery for any church.

We Utahns enjoy our mountains, our hiking, our nature. Although we have a bustling capital city on the foothills, it only takes minutes to be out in the wilderness of our lofty mountains. The noise of the city is replaced with birds sweetly singing or the trickle of water from a brook or stream. There is a peacefulness to our part of the world. Some talk about it religiously, as if nature is their church. Rightly God's greatness is revealed with the lofty mountain grandeur we take in.

Part of what we enjoy of the nature around us is getting away from the problems of the world. Violence, politics, all that stuff on the evening news is left at the foothills. But, sadly, that peace doesn't last. Eventually we have to go down and right back into the thick of things. Other times we bring the violence, the politics, the bickering, the arguing, the anger with us up into that lofty mountain grandeur. Even in the most peaceful places, our souls are often not at rest because we are sinful people living in a sinful world. We simply can't get rid of it or get away from it. Lasting peace eludes us.

God, though, wants us to keep looking up just like how we look up at the mountains after we pull into the parking lot here. He wants you and me looking up to his holy mountain, his lofty mountain grandeur, where he lives. He wants you to stream to his holy mountain, to him, to give us a peace beyond the best hiking get away we have ever gone on. On his mountain, God ends all hostilities, all sin. The Lord gives us a forever peace, a peace not brought about by any government or politician or movement, a peace that lasts longer than a lifetime, a peace between you, me, and God, a peace caused by God taking away our sins and him bringing us to himself. God gives us peace for our souls. Thank you, Lord, for that spiritual peace. Then sings our souls: How great thou art to bring us forever peace on your lofty mountain grandeur!

We sing stanza 2 of Hymn 256.

Meditation #3 Then Sings My Soul: How Great Thou Art for His Son Not Sparing!

God's Word from Mark 15:37-39: ³⁷ **With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.** ³⁸ **The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.** ³⁹ **And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"**

How do we get to the summit of the Lord's holy mountain with that forever peace, where the words "war" and "hostility" are forgotten, never to be mentioned again? The only way up that lofty mountain grandeur came from God, his Son not sparing.

Many people took in the events of Good Friday. One in particular was a centurion, a Roman commander in charge of 100 troops. He watched his soldiers drive the nails into Jesus' hands and feet only to hear him say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He saw the man lifted up but at the same time refusing to take the doped wine offered him – no pain relief. He heard the taunts of the people who mocked him, telling Jesus to save himself if he really was the Son of God, but Jesus gave no rebuttal, no rebuke. The centurion's soldiers joined in, even the criminals did, but not an unkind word was spoken by Jesus. Instead of complaints or bitterness, he heard Jesus tell the one criminal next to him that he would be in paradise with him that very day. This Jesus criminal, who was judged worthy of capital punishment, was offering eternal life in paradise to criminals?? This man who should be moaning and groaning in distress instead thought of his mother and kindly entrusted her to another, to provide for her. The most anguish he heard was the pained cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" but still this Jesus went on. He heard this Jesus cry out a victorious "It is finished!" and then commit his spirit into his Father's hands. He watched this Son of God choose to die.

Something changed in that centurion as he observed all this. What he believed before, we don't know, but his confession rings as clearly today as it did nearly 2000 years ago: "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

What this centurion witnessed we know was God the Father's will. He sent his one and only Son to be our substitute, to bear the punishment that we could not. God's Son did not take his own burden, but my burden, our burdens. He died not for his sin, but for mine and yours. He chose to do this for you and me; we did not choose him. His actions, his sacrifice, save us. And he did this gladly. This is how great our God's love is for us. Every time we look at the cross, we can remember that he did this for each and every single one of us. When we remember this, we can scarce take it all in. In humility, in gratitude, our souls sing: "How great thou art for your Son not sparing!"

We sing stanza 3 of Hymn 256.

Meditation #4 Then Sings My Soul: How Great Thou Art for Taking Me Home!

God's Word from Revelation 7:9-17: ⁹ **After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.** ¹⁰ **And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."** ¹¹ **All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,** ¹² **saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"** ¹³ **Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"** ¹⁴ **I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."** ¹⁵ **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. ¹⁶ ‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,’ nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

We live in the End Times. Jesus’ return to judge, the Last Day, will happen at any moment. The world will end; it will not go on in its current state forever. If that scares you, remember that God did not spare his own Son so that you would be with him forever.

Through the Apostle John, God gives us a vivid description of what life will be like after our last day here on earth. There will be a great multitude, more than what we could ever count - people from every nation, tribe, people, and language. They, we, will be wearing white robes, holding palm branches, and singing! Singing because their Savior God has rescued them, rescued us. Their Savior God has wiped every tear from their eyes, our eyes. Never again will we hunger. Never again will we thirst. Never again will we have an argument around the Thanksgiving table. Never again will we feel lonely or separated on holidays.

This is what is in store for us when Jesus comes to take us home. This is what we have in store for us because we have been washed clean in the waters of Holy Baptism, that washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit which clothed with Christ’s perfection and adopted us into God’s holy family. That is what we have in store for us as we eat and drink Jesus’ body and blood given and poured out for you and me for the forgiveness of our sins.

God has prepared for us a wonderful future, a future where we will join the marvelous choir of voices on the Last Day. We will sing an even greater song than what we have sung tonight. As we look forward to our end here on earth, our souls sing: How great thou art, God, for taking me home!

We sing **stanza 4 of Hymn 256**.