

“I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord”

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from articles by C. Michael Hawn and Dennis C. Abernathy)

Background:

A. “I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord” (1801) is perhaps the earliest hymn still currently used that was composed by a citizen of the United States. The author, Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), was one of the well-known religious leaders of his time. Dwight was precocious, reading the Bible at age 4, learning Latin during grammar school and entering Yale College at age 13. Graduating from Yale at 17, he taught grammar school in New Haven and then became a tutor at Yale. Dwight served as a chaplain during the Revolutionary War with George Washington. Hymnologist Albert Bailey notes that not only were Dwight’s sermons an inspiration for the soldiers he served, but his songs as well. Following the war, Dwight settled between 1778-1783 in Northampton, where he was a farmer, preacher, student, and representative in the state legislature. After becoming a Congregational minister in Fairfield, Conn., Dwight supplemented his insufficient salary by opening a private school. The success of his academy led to his election in 1795 as president of Yale College.

During the tenure of Timothy Dwight at Yale College, Tom Paine's infamous book *The Age of Reason* was sweeping the country. Yale, like other colleges, had become infected with the “free thought” of Paine, Rousseau, and the French Revolution. It is estimated that there were no more than five people who professed to be Christians on the entire Yale campus. Dwight took to the chapel pulpit with his Bible in hand and his dynamic leadership ignited a spiritual revival which soon spread to other New England campuses as well.

“I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord,” published in the 1801 revision of Isaac Watts’ *Psalms of David*, is the only remaining hymn that has survived. He edited the collection of Isaac Watt’s hymns and also wrote thirty-three original hymns. All but one have been forgotten, but this one stands out today as the only hymn written in America during the two centuries after the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, that is still in common use. The original eight stanzas have been reduced to four or five in most hymnals. He based the song on Psalm 137:1-6, a lament for Jerusalem by the Jews in exile, into a Christian hymn that sings of the glory of the church.” Stanza two borrows the image from Psalm 17:8, “Keep me as the apple of thine eye,” to describe this relationship.

All of Timothy Dwight’s accomplishments seem more amazing when it is realized that for the last forty years of his life he was unable to read consecutively for more than fifteen minutes a day. His defective eyesight had been caused by a case of small-pox, and the pain in his eyes is said to have been agonizing and constant.

The two verses omitted in most contemporary hymnals represent the times of the rise of atheism after the Revolutionary War. Dwight wrote in the form of a prayer psalm that should he deny the Lord, he asks God to take away his abilities. Missing verses:
Should I with scoffers join, Her altars to abuse?
No! Better far my tongue were dumb, My hand its skill should lose.
If e’er to bless Thy sons My voice or hands deny,
These hands let useful skills forsake, This voice in silence die.

I. VERSE ONE - GOD'S LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

I love thy kingdom, Lord, The house of thine abode;
The church our blest Redeemer saved with His own precious blood.
I love Thy church, O God! Her walls before Thee stand,
Dear, as the apple of Thine eye, and graven on Thy hand.

- A. The church and the kingdom are the same - Matt. 16:18-19.
 - 1. The church of our Lord is not some "afterthought" that came into being because of the postponement of the kingdom. The church is the kingdom and the kingdom is the church.
- B. The church is the house of God - 1Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:19-22; Heb. 3:4-6
- C. The church is saved by the blood of Christ - Acts 20:28, 2:47; Eph. 5:23
 - 1. Without the shedding of Christ's blood as the perfect sacrifice and offering for sin, there would be no church today.
- D. We ought to love the Lord's church.
 - 1. How do we prove your love for the church? - 2Cor. 8:8, 24
 - 2. How does one prove his love for his mate?
 - 3. When we see a lack of dedication and zeal for the church on the part of those who profess to be a part of it, we doubt their love for the church.
 - 4. The church is precious to the Lord - Eph. 5:25-32

II. VERSE TWO - OUR LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

For her my tears shall fall, For her my pray'rs ascend;
To her my cares and toils be giv'n, Till toils and cares shall end.
Beyond the highest joy I prize her heavenly ways,
Her sweet communion, solemn vows, Her hymns of love and praise.

- A. We ought to bring our toils and cares to it. We need the close communion and fellowship that is found in the Lord's church - Gal. 6:2
 - 1. Many though, when they have cares and problems, do not seek help from brethren, but rather do the opposite. They leave the church until they resolve their problems.
- B. What about your care and concern for the church? - Matt. 6:33
 - 1. Do we toil and work for it? We ought to prize the church as our highest joy. It is the greatest institution on this earth. It belongs to the Lord and is composed of the saved.

III. VERSE THREE - JESUS IS OUR FRIEND, SAVIOR, AND KING

Jesus, Thou Friend Divine, Our Savior and our King!
Thy hand from every snare and foe, shall great deliverance bring.
Sure as thy truth shall last, To Zion shall be giv'n.
The brightest glories earth can yield, And brightest bliss of heaven.

- A. John 14:13-14; 1John 4:14
- B. Jesus is to be honored as the eternal, immortal and invisible King
 - 1. 1Tim. 1:17, 6:15; Rev. 17:14
- C. We are called into His kingdom - 1Thes. 2:12-13; Col. 1:13
- D. The church will be honored with the bliss of heaven - 1Cor. 15:24

Conclusion:

- A. This lesson uses an example of a man who loved the kingdom of the Lord at a time when the kingdom of the Lord was mocked and despised by the culture of his own day.
 - 1. Our day is like his; we live in a time when loving the kingdom is considered unpopular, foolishness, and may one day be under attack.
 - 2. We need heroes who loved the kingdom, because we need to love the kingdom heroically ourselves.
- B. The church is clearly "the apple of the Lord's eye." He loved it enough to die for it - Acts 20:28.
- C. It is through Christ and in the church that we receive reconciliation - Eph. 2:16
- D. If we appreciate the death He died to save us from our sins, then we must appreciate His Church for which He shed His blood.
- E. "We do not change the world simply by going to church; we change the world by being the church." (Derek Thomas)