**The Story & Theology of Particular Hymns**

Lesson 11 – Horatius Bonar - “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say” (#304) & “Not What My Hands Have Done” (#461)

**Biography**

* 1808-1889
* Born in Scotland
* Studied at the University of Edinburgh
* Ministered in Kelso, Scotland for 27 years (1838-1865)
* In 1843, there was a disruption against the government-controlled, established Church of Scotland. This led to the Free Church of Scotland
* Bonar was a major leader in this revolt against the established church and the rise of independent churches free from governmental control.
* In 1866, he becomes the pastor of Chalmers Memorial Church in Edinburgh and labors there for 23 years until his death.
* Bonar wrote theological documents on prophecy (end-times), evangelistic tracts, devotional books, and over 600 hymns.
* Bonar was a Calvinist but he rejected the rigid Calvinism that permeated throughout the Church of Scotland and wanted “to fill my hymns with the love and light of Christ.”
* His ministry was characterized by earnest zeal, devotion, and a concern for soul-winning.
* “His mind was saturated with the Scriptures, and his heart was possessed by a faith far broader and more generous than the strict Calvinistic creed, to which his intellect gave assent.”
* Ironically, Bonar’s churches still held to the Scottish practice of exclusive psalmody and it was only at the end of his ministry/life that his hymns began to be sung in his church.
* One of his last requests was not to have a biography written of him. He wanted all the glory to go to Christ alone.

**Occasion for “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say”**

* First published in 1846
* Bonar wrote the lines while pastoring the Presbyterian Church at Kelso.
* He intended the hymn to be used by the children since he was always concerned that they learn the truths of the person and work of Christ.
* Bonar loved children despite he and his wife losing 5 children in rapid succession, but God gave him hundreds of children through Sunday School.
* This is considered to be Bonar’s finest hymn of all that he wrote.

**Theology of “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say”**

* The theme of the hymn is that of revived life and joyous rest in Jesus.
* The structure of the hymn is to present an invitation that Jesus gives in Scripture followed by human response and results.
* Verse 1 – We see the invitation in the first 2 lines of the verse. The human response is that I came to Jesus in such a condition as He described and in Jesus I found rest and peace.
* Verse 2 – We see the invitation in the first 2 lines of the verse. The human response is that I came to Jesus in such a condition of thirst and in Jesus my thirst was quenched and my soul revived.
* Verse 3 – We see the invitation in the first 2 lines of the verse. The human response is that I looked to Jesus out of the darkness and in Him found the light of life in which I will walk until death.

**Occasion for “Not What My Hands Have Done”**

* First published in 1861
* It first appeared with the title, “Salvation Through Christ Alone”
* It originally was 12 verses and each verse began with “not what these hands have done”

**Theology of “Not What My Hands Have Done”**

* This hymn is a clear expression of Bonar’s strong Calvinistic theology that man’s only basis for God’s favor and salvation rests solely on the finished work of Christ.
* Verse 1 – None of my works, not even those works that are seen as spiritually good, can achieve my salvation
* Verse 2 – The work of Christ, especially the blood shed on the cross, is the only thing that can achieve my salvation. It requires God loving me first.
* Verse 3 – Only divine grace can pardon us. Only divine power can break our bondage. Nothing else can suffice.
* Verses 4-5 – These 2 verses are a response of praise to the sovereign intervention of divine grace in applying the work of Christ to our lives.