**The Story & Theology of Particular Hymns**

Lesson 9 – Charles Wesley – “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing” (#164) & “And Can It Be That I Should Gain?” (#455)

**Biography**

* 1707-1788
* Family had a rich Anglican heritage
* Started the “Holy Club” at Oxford with John Wesley and eventually these clubs became the Methodist movement
* As the sailed to America to evangelize Indians, they came in contact with a group of German Moravians
* During a storm, Wesley wrote the following in his journal about the Moravians: “In the midst of the Psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the main sail in pieaces, covered the ship and poured in between the decks….A terrible screaming began among the English. The Moravians looked up, and without intermission calmly sang on. I asked one of them afterwards, ‘Were you not afraid?’ He answered, ‘Thank God, no!’”
* The Wesleys were hugely influenced by the Moravians.
* Charles Wesley poured over their hymnal and translated a number into English for use in Anglican services.
* It was Moravian influence, once they were back in England, that led to their conversion experience at Aldersgate, London.
* The Wesleys faced opposition from those within and associated with the established Church of England.
* Sometimes mobs would be inflamed by Anglican ministers preaching against the Wesleys from the pulpit. These mobs would go from house to house charging the Wesleys with preaching blasphemy and encouraging people to run them out of town.
* A description from one account: “If it was hard on the preachers, it was worse on the converts. They were outrageously treated – stoned, mauled, ducked, hounded with bulldogs, threatened, homes looted, businesses ruined. Anyone who walked through a town could pick out, by their ruinous condition, the homes where the Methodists lived.”
* Exhibited a concern for ministering the gospel to poor prisoners in Newgate.
* The Wesleys preached to all social classes of the mercy of God and how He could change any life for those who believed in Him.
* Since pulpits were closed to them, Charles began preaching open air in fields through the influence of George Whitfield.
* “He prayed with uncommon fervency….He then preached about half an hour in such a manner as I have scarce ever heard any man preach. I think I never heard any man labor so earnestly to convince his hearers they were all by nature in a sinful, lost, undone, damnable state; that notwithstanding, there was a possibility of their salvation, through faith in Christ….He invited, allured, quickened, and labored, if it were possible, to compel all, and every of his hearers, to believe in Christ for salvation.”

**Occasion for “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing”**

* Written in 1739 on the 1st anniversary of his conversion experience
* Inspired by a remark by an influential Moravian leader who reportedly said, “Had I a thousand tongues, I would praise Christ Jesus with all of them.”
* The original hymn had 19(!) verses.
* The original title was “For the Anniversary Day of One’s Conversion”
* Most of the verses that are no longer used dealt with Charles’ own conversion experience in a very intimate and personal manner

**Theology of “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing”**

* A hymn of praise to God. There’s a sense in which it is a response to the work of God in one’s life to bring about salvation.
* Verse 1: Praise God for his glories and grace
* Verse 2: A plea for God to give the ability to proclaim God’s praise throughout the Earth
* Verse 3: Praise for the power of Jesus and the effects He has on those He redeems
* Verse 4: Praise for the power of Jesus and what He accomplishes in those He redeems
* Verse 5: Praise for the power of Jesus in salvation
* Verse 6: An appropriate response to salvation in Jesus is one of praise

**Occasion for “And Can It Be That I Should Gain?”**

* Charles was converted on May 21. On Tuesday, May 23, he began to compose this hymn.

**Theology of “And Can It Be That I Should Gain?”**

* Verse 1: Amazement at the love of God for such a sinner as I
* Verse 2: Amazement at the cross which is a mystery even to angels who long to peer into the mind of God
* Verse 3: Amazement at the reality of the Incarnation
* Some modification to verse 3: “emptied Himself of all but love” 🡪”humbled Himself so great his love!” & “bled for Adam’s helpless race”🡪”bled for all His chosen race”
* Verse 4: Amazement at what happens in the moment of conversion. This is considered to be Charles’ testimony of what happened in his conversion
* Verse 5: Amazement at what it means to possess salvation