

# The Conversion of Charles Wesley

## In His Own Words

Article by Mary Katherine May

A hymn still commonly sung today is the wonderful, **O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing** (1739), taken from a longer poem authored by Charles Wesley for the one-year anniversary of his coming to salvation to Jesus Christ, which was on the Day of Pentecost, May 21, 1738.

Previous to May of 1738, Charles had been earnest in his efforts to be a man of God, preaching salvation, but for all of the trying he was fairly ineffectual. During the period prior to this date, Wesley himself understood that his faith was of the legalistic kind, rather than that of a flowing of the Holy Spirit.

**Charles was known to have been ill often during his life. On February 24, in the year that would bring him a new life he wrote...**

*Soon after Peter Bohler came to my bedside. I asked him to pray for me. He seemed unwilling at first, but, beginning very faintly, he raised his voice by degrees, and prayed for my recovery with strange confidence. Then he took me by the hand, and calmly said, "You will not die now." I thought within myself, "I cannot hold out in this pain till morning. If it abates before, I believe I may recover." He asked me, "Do you hope to be saved?" "Yes." "For what reason do you hope it?" "Because I have used my best endeavours to serve God." He shook his head, and said no more. I thought him very uncharitable, saying in my heart, "What, are not my endeavours a sufficient ground of hope? Would he rob me of my endeavours? I have nothing else to trust to."*

**The Reverend Wesley, however, was not ready yet to let go of his human attempts at success. Again in April, he fell ill.**

*Friday, April 28th. No sooner was I got to James Hutton's, having removed my things thither from his father's, than the pain in my side returned, and with that my fever. Having disappointed God in his last visitation, he has now again brought me to the bed of sickness. Towards told-night I received some relief by bleeding. In the morning Dr. Cockburn came to see me; and a better physician, Peter Bohler, whom God had detained in England for my good. He stood by my bedside, sad prayed over me, that now at least I might see the divine intention, in this and my late illness. I immediately thought it might be that I should again consider Bohler's doctrine of faith; examine myself whether I was in the faith; and if I was not, never cease seeking and longing after it, till I attained it.*

**Charles, very sick with bodily illness, wrote in his diary after the fact:**

*Sunday, May 21st, 1738. I waked in hope and expectation of His coming. At nine my brother and some friends came, and sang an hymn to the Holy Ghost. My comfort and hope were hereby increased. In about half-an-hour they went: I betook myself to prayer; the substance as follows:--`O Jesus, thou hast said, 'I will come unto you'; thou has said, 'I will send the*

*Comforter unto you'; thou hast said, 'My Father and I will come unto you, and make our abode with you,' Thou art God who canst not lie; I wholly rely upon thy most true promise: accomplish it in they time and manner.'*"

*Having said this, was composing myself to sleep, in quietness and peace, when I heard one come in (Mrs. Musgrave, I thought, by the voice) and say, 'In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise, and believe, and thou shalt be healed of all thy infirmities.' I wondered how it should enter into her head to speak in that manner. The words struck me to the heart. I sighed, and said within myself, 'O that Christ would but speak thus to me!' I lay musing and trembling: then thought, 'but what if it should be Him? I will send at least to see.' I rang, and, Mrs. Turner coming, I desired her to send up Mrs. Musgrave. She went down, and, returning, said, 'Mrs. Musgrave had not been up here.'*"

*My heart sank within me at the word, and I hoped it might be Christ indeed. However, I sent her down again to inquire, and felt in the meantime a strange palpitation of heart. I said, yet feared to say, 'I believe, I believe!' She came up again and said, 'It was I, a weak, sinful creature, spoke: but the words were Christ's: he commanded me to say them, and so constrained me that I could not forbear.'*"

*I sent for Mr. Bray, and asked him whether I believed. He answered, I ought not to doubt of it: it was Christ spoke to me. He knew it; and willed us to pray together: 'but first,' said he, 'I will read what I have casually opened upon: 'Blessed is the man whose unrighteousness is forgiven, and whose sin is covered: blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth no sin, and in whose spirit is no guilt.''" Still I felt a violent opposition and reluctance to believe; yet still the Spirit of God strove with my own and the evil spirit, till by degrees he chased away the darkness of my unbelief. I found myself convinced, I know not how, nor when; and immediately fell to intercession...*

*I now found myself at peace with God, and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ. My temper for the rest of the day was, mistrust of my own great, but before unknown, weakness. I saw that by faith I stood; by the continual support of my faith, which kept me from falling, though of my self I am ever sinking into sin. I went to bed still sensible of my own weakness, (I humbly hope to be more and more so), yet content of Christ's protection.*

Thus, we see that revival is not something only for congregations, communities, or even larger groups, it also happens individually. How many of us, if we had the gift of Charles Wesley, would express ourselves otherwise than as he did? We also see the difference between professing Christian faith and of having been convicted in the faith.

# Charles Wesley's Hymn

Written for the First Anniversary of His Salvation  
Pentecost, 1739

1. Glory to God, and praise and love be ever, ever given, by saints below and saints above, the church in earth and heaven.
2. On this glad day the glorious Sun of Righteousness arose; on my benighted soul he shone and filled it with repose.
3. Sudden expired the legal strife, 'twas then I ceased to grieve; my second, real, living life I then began to live.
4. Then with my heart I first believed, believed with faith divine, power with the Holy Ghost received to call the Savior mine.
5. I felt my Lord's atoning blood close to my soul applied; me, me he loved, the Son of God, for me, for me he died!
6. I found and owned his promise true, ascertained of my part, my pardon passed in heaven I knew when written on my heart.
7. **O for a thousand tongues to sing my dear Redeemer's praise! The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of his grace.**
8. **My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim, to spread through all the earth abroad the honors of thy name.**
9. **Jesus! the name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease; 'tis music in the sinner's ears, 'tis life, and health, and peace!**
10. **He breaks the power of canceled sin, he sets the prisoner free; his blood can make the foulest clean; his blood availed for me.**
11. He speaks, and listening to his voice new life the dead receive; the mournful, broken hearts rejoice, the humble poor believe.
12. Hear him, ye deaf, his praise, ye dumb, your loosened tongues employ; ye blind, behold your Savior come, and leap, ye lame, for joy.
13. Look unto him, ye nations, own your God, ye fallen race! Look, and be saved through faith alone, be justified by grace!
14. See all your sins on Jesus laid; the Lamb of God was slain, his soul was once an offering made for every soul of man.
15. Harlots and publicans and thieves, in holy triumph join! Saved is the sinner that believes from crimes as great as mine.
16. Murderers and all ye hellish crew, ye sons of lust and pride, believe the Savior died for you; for me the Savior died.
17. With me, your chief, you then shall know, shall feel your sins forgiven; anticipate your heaven below and own that love is heaven.

In the United States of America, O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing is very much married to the tune name AZMON, composed in 1828 by Carl Gotthelf Gläser of Germany. Interestingly, the was introduced here in America by Lowell Mason (1792-1872) but coupled to a different hymn written by Isaac Watts, titled with the comment, "Access to the Throne of Grace by a Mediator". Mason is the one who titled the tune AZMON, the Hebrew word for "fortress."

Isaac Watts, for the hymn aficionado, needs no introduction. He is known as the “Father of the English hymn,” for the significant contribution of versifying the Psalms. The story goes, that as a youth Watts was dissatisfied with Psalm singing in church. One day he went to his father, a pastor, and requested permission to write the Psalms in poetic form, which was distractedly granted, the Reverend Watts being in the process of writing a sermon. Son Isaac replied that he had already done so -- and here is one now.

### **Access to the Throne of Grace by a Mediator**

(to sing, use same tune: AZMON)

Come, let us lift our joyful eyes  
Up to the courts above  
And smile to see our Father there  
Upon a throne of love.

Once 'twas a seat of dreadful wrath,  
And shot devouring flame  
Our God appeared “consuming fire,”  
And Vengeance was his name.

Rich were the drops of Jesus' blood  
That calmed his frowning face  
That sprinkled o'er the burning throne,  
And turned the wrath to grace.

Now we may bow before his feet,  
And venture near the Lord;  
No fiery cherub guards his seat,  
Nor double-flaming sword.

The peaceful gates of heav'nly bliss  
Are opened by the Son;  
High let us raise our notes of praise,  
And reach th' almighty throne.

To thee ten thousand thanks we bring,  
Great Advocate on high;  
And glory to th' eternal King,  
That lays his fury by.

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