

Podcast 270 Just as I Am

For the past few months, when I get up in the morning I open my laptop and begin my personal devotions by reading the history of a hymn, and then I sing it to myself. After this I read my Old Testament, followed by my New Testament reading for the day, and then I pray for my for my and others using a prayer list. This has become my new rhythm.

By the way, I have Hymns for Family Worship on my website as a PDF which is how I have it open on my computer. I like to begin with the hymn because as I'm reading the Bible, I'm generally singing this hymn which is now fresh in my mind.

This morning I thought we'd study one hymn. I'll read the history first then we'll talk about the lyrics. It's a famous hymn, called "Just as I Am." Reading the history touched my heart again as I was preparing for this morning.

Let's pray before we continue in our study.

Father, thank You for sacred music. Thank You for the people and in their circumstances, and in the places in which they were being molded into becoming more like Jesus. Thank You for their experiences that they were able to share. Thank You for their giftings that they were able to take these lessons You were teaching them and put them into rhyme and meter, and poetry.

Altogether You've created these little masterpieces and how they've touched people through the ages. I appreciate Your hand in the matter. I appreciate the willingness of these people to write. I pray that you'll all talk to each of our hearts today as we contemplate Just as I am. In Jesus name, Amen.

As I read these historical sketches, which were put together by a few friends of mine, I'm always impressed by what the authors and composer were going through. I'm impressed by the lives of the hymn writers. I'm impressed by their talent. Some of these people were gifted poets. Then they gave their talents to God and He used them. This one starts with a story of a young woman who was bedridden. Here is the history.

Charlotte Elliott was born in England in 1789. She painted portraits and wrote humorous poetry. However, her health began to fail when she was 30, and eventually she was bedridden. Her physical limitations left Charlotte frustrated and irritable.

In 1822, Dr. Cesar Malan, a Swiss evangelist, met Elliott. One account says he asked her how her soul was toward God. She rebuffed him, stating that was a personal conversation she did not want to have. Dr. Malan responded gently that he would not press the matter but he did wish that Elliott would give Jesus her heart and use her talents for Him.

God used Elliott's very rudeness toward Dr. Malan to reveal her deep spiritual need. As she pondered her harsh response to Dr. Malan's well-intended inquiry, she realized her heart was proud and far from God! She approached Dr. Malan several days later and confessed that she had been mulling over his question and apologized for the way she had responded. "I want to come to Jesus," she told Dr. Malan, "but I don't know how." He replied, "Why not come just as you are?"

It seems that Elliott counted that night her spiritual birthday. But it didn't mean that she didn't need to be reminded of her need to trust Christ. She often struggled with feelings of worthlessness due to her sickness and confinement.

Fourteen years later, her brother was putting on a benefit bazaar for a school he planned to open. The flurry of preparations was going on around Charlotte, but she was too ill to assist much. The night before the bazaar, the feelings of uselessness flooded her once again. She managed to fall into an uneasy sleep, but the feelings returned when she awoke the next morning.

Charlotte Elliott fought back. She arose and took pen and paper and composed the words of her personal testimony, no doubt harking back to the truth Dr. Malan shared with her the night she first responded to Jesus: "Just as I am, without one plea." It mattered not that she couldn't contribute physically to the bazaar. She knew her worth lay in the blood of Jesus that He shed for her. All that needed to be done had been accomplished on the Cross thousands of years before. The truth of the words settled Elliott's spirit.

The words have calmed many a spirit since. No, Charlotte Elliott didn't help with the bazaar that day, but her brother said later, "In the course of a long ministry, I hope to have been permitted to see some fruit of my labors; but I feel more has been done by a single hymn of my sister's."

Indeed, "Just As I Am" has touched numerous Jesus seekers. William Bradbury wrote the popular tune we sing it to today. One seeker told of the night that he made a public stand for Christ. He had been in an evangelistic meeting, and the song leader had led four verses of "Just As I Am," followed by "Almost Persuaded, Now to Believe." During the second song, the seeker went forward. "I believe that that was the moment when I made my real commitment to Jesus Christ," he later wrote. "No bells went off inside me. No signs flashed across the tabernacle ceiling. . . . I simply felt at peace. Quiet, not delirious. Happy and peaceful. . . . All I knew was that the world looked different when I got up to do the milking. . . and catch the school bus."

That man was Billy Graham, who preached the gospel to over 2 billion people via radio, television, and at citywide crusades. And Graham introduced "Just As I Am" to millions throughout his 61 years of active ministry. If only Elliott could have known how effective she truly was.

"Behold, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

"Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Hymns for Family Worship #41

Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am, and waiting not, to rid my soul of one dark blot;
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Just as I am, though tossed about, with many a conflict, many a doubt;
Fightings within, and fears without, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind; sight, riches, healing of the mind;
Yes, all I need, in Thee to find, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive, wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Just as I am, Thy love unknown, has broken every barrier down;
Now, to be Thine, yea, Thine alone, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Just as I am, Thy very own; Made worthy by thy blood alone,
To sit beside Thee, share Thy throne, O Lamb of God I come, I come!

When Billy Graham came to faith in Christ in 1937, he didn't go forward until 2 songs had been sung: "Just as I am" and "Almost Persuaded". When the final verse of the 2nd song had been sung twice, he went forward. He was grateful that the man of God in the pulpit patiently waited for more responses to the invitation. – "How Sweet the Sound" by George Beverly Shea

P. P. Bliss was inspired to write this hymn after hearing a message on Acts 26:28, where Agrippa tells Paul he is almost persuaded. The preacher said, "He who is almost persuaded is almost saved, but to be almost saved is to be entirely lost." – Songs of the Spirit by Martin

I thought you might be interested in also hearing the words to "Almost Persuaded" since those were the two hymns that were used of God to persuade Billy Graham.

"Almost persuaded" now to believe; "Almost persuaded" Christ to receive;
Seems now some soul to say, "Go, Spirit, go Thy way,
Some more convenient day on Thee I'll call."

"Almost persuaded," come, come today; "Almost persuaded," turn not away;
Jesus invites you here, Angels are ling'ring near,
Prayers rise from hearts so dear; O wand'rer, come!

Oh, be persuaded! Christ never fails—Oh, be persuaded! His blood avails—
Can save from every sin, Cleanse you without, within—
Will you not let Him in? Open the door!

“Almost persuaded,” harvest is past! “Almost persuaded,” doom comes at last;
“Almost” cannot avail; “Almost” is but to fail!
Sad, sad that bitter wail—“Almost—but lost!”

Be now persuaded, oh, sinner, hear! Be now persuaded, Jesus is near;
His voice is pleading still, Turn now with heart and will,
Peace will your spirit fill—Oh, turn today!

Steve: Isn't that history rich?

Scott: Yeah, just stunning. I don't think I've heard that about Billy Graham before. I'm visualizing this in my head because I was there when Billy Graham came to Cincinnati. We sang in the choir in the stadium. I saw thousands of people going forward as George Beverly Shea is singing that song. It's nothing but the movement of the spirit of God. You can't describe it. You can't explain it any other way.

Steve: What touches me is that Charlotte was a painter and a poetry writer. She was gifted and at the same time, she was broken. She was humbled. She was frustrated, irritable. You could see why she'd want to be bitter. Yet it was at that low point in her life when Dr. Malan planted the seeds of the gospel. He responded to her in the spirit.

Then she used her talents to write this hymn that has touched so many people. I resonate with this hymn, because for many years, I thought that somehow God loved me more if I was able to do something to earn that love.

This is a song about grace. This is a song about each of us just as we are. It's not what we do. It's what Jesus has done. This is a powerful truth and I believe Christians need to keep hearing this as much as non-Christians.

We can easily fall into the trap that says, "Well, He doesn't love me as much because I haven't read my Bible yet or I did this or I did that." No, he loves us just as we are. In fact, He came to love us when we were sinners. He continues to love us and says in Scripture that nothing that can separate us from His love.

Thank You, Father, for Your wonderful love. Thank You for using Your Charlotte. Thank You for the faithful words of the evangelist to her heart. Thank You, Spirit of God for quickening them. Thank You that when she was tempted to be discouraged, instead, she plucked up so

to speak her courage and wrote out her testimony, which then turned into this wonderful hymn.

Thank You for Billy Graham. Thank You for his ministry to billions. Thank You for these truths that resonated way back in the time of Christ and continue to resonate today as we are about one believe that your blood was shed for me. We worship You this morning. In Jesus name, Amen.