

## BE STILL, MY SOUL, THE LORD IS ON THY SIDE

Katharina von Schlegel

The hymn is sung to a beautiful orchestral piece of music, *Finlandia*, written by the Finnish composer and violinist Sibelius in 1899-1900. We also sing other hymns to this melody, notably, “We rest on Thee, Our Shield and our Defender’.

Little is known about Katharina Amalia Dorothea von Schlegel, born in 1697 in Köthen, Germany (where J.S. Bach lived, 1719-23). She was a Lutheran who wrote twenty-nine hymns, the most well-known being “Be still my soul”, published in 1752. She died around 1768.

In addition to the three verses in our hymn books, she wrote two other verses ...

(verse 3) Be still, my soul: when dearest friends depart,  
And all is darkened in the vale of tears,  
Then shalt thou better know His love, His heart,  
Who comes to soothe thy sorrow and thy fears.  
Be still, my soul: thy Jesus can repay  
From His own fullness all He takes away.

(verse 5) Be still, my soul: begin the song of praise  
On earth, believing, to Thy Lord on high;  
Acknowledge Him in all thy words and ways,  
So shall He view thee with a well-pleased eye.  
Be still, my soul: the Sun of life divine  
Through passing clouds shall but more brightly shine.

If it hadn't been for Jane Laurie Borthwick who was born in Edinburgh, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1813, we probably would never have heard of this hymn. The Borthwick family were members of the newly-formed Free Church of Scotland.

Jane never married, and during a time she lived in Switzerland she became interested in German hymns. On returning to Scotland, her father suggested she might translate some of them into English. So, along with her sister Sarah, - the wife of a Free Kirk Minister, - she did translate some of them and they were eventually published as the *Hymns From the Land of Luther (1854)*. She died in Edinburgh on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1897.

The hymn centres upon Ps. 46:10, **Be still, and know that I am God.** ... The psalmist speaks about God as being a refuge (v.1) ... we only need a refuge when we are escaping from harm. Obviously the psalmist is relating to

menacing circumstances, which is confirmed by v.2, *Therefore will not we fear*. He wrote this psalm during a time of trouble (v.1), when it was as if the earth was shaking beneath him (v.2), and the waves of distress were threatening to overwhelm him (v.3). ... Drastic times, when his world was falling apart.

The natural reaction would be to panic, however, the psalmist turns to the Lord ... What else could he have done? ... He could have *blamed* the Lord. He could have told the Lord it was His fault! ... But he did not blame Him, instead he *blessed* the Lord, <sup>4</sup> *There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.* <sup>5</sup> *God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.* ... No matter what troubles I have, I'm privileged to belong to the Lord, and I'll keep trusting for <sup>7</sup> *The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.* ... I will behold the works of the LORD, and I'll going to *stop* ... and be *still* ... and trust Him.

**Why we need to be still** ... The word 'still' in this verse doesn't mean 'quiet' or 'soothing'. It is not the word David uses in Ps. 23:2, *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters*, - that's a word which *does* mean 'calm', 'restful', 'quiet', 'peaceful' ... but not this word in Ps. 46 for it pictures a conflict which continues until someone, - and intermediary, - separates the warring factions and makes them renounce their weapons. It is only after the fighting has finished, - when the conflict has ended, - the stillness comes. The Jewish Hebrew Bible translates it, "Desist, and know that I am God" ... No matter what else is happening around you, *I am God!* He is the Intermediary, the Mediator,

Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.  
 Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.  
 Leave to thy God to order and provide;  
 In every change, He faithful will remain.  
 Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heavenly friend  
 Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

This was one of Eric Liddell's hymns. He was the athlete who refused to run on the Lord's Day in the 1924 Olympics (*Chariots of Fire*). He later became a missionary to China and was imprisoned during the Second World War. During his imprisonment he taught this hymn in the prison camp. In such desperate conditions, the Lord showed him how to 'be still', to 'bear patiently the cross of grief or pain', and to 'leave to thy God to order and provide'.

This was also the psalm Martin Luther resorted to in his darkest days. His famous hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is our God” was based upon this psalm.

The same One Who stood up in the boat on the Sea of Galilee and commanded the winds and the waves to “Be still” (Mk. 4:39), is the same God Who speaks to His people, **10 Be still, and know that I am God ...** Sometimes the sea is calm and beautiful around us, - life is a real joy ... but there are other traumatic occasions when it seems the struggles could overwhelm us. Here is a psalm which brings assurance to God’s people that *He* is in control, **5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved ... God shall help her, and that right early.**

He loves her, His people, - she is His Bride ... He is sanctifying and cleansing her so that His Son will present her in front Him, **Eph. 5:27 a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that [she] should be holy and without blemish.** And she responds, **Songs 6:3 I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.**

And that is the wisdom of being still, as we read in another psalm, **Ps. 63:6 When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. 7 Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. 8 My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me. ... And His promise is that 1 Cor. 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.**

**That’s why we need to be still ... But, how do we be still? ...** You keep believing the God of the Bible, and often it means you have to ‘follow hard’ when you cannot understand what is happening. You have heard it said, “This Book will keep you from sin, but sin will keep you from this Book”. Difficult times can keep you from this Book, especially if you go to other places to find answers ... You don’t need to go anywhere else, but to the Book. ... This Book is the Bible, the Word of God. ... It is as a lamp unto your feet, and a light unto your path (Ps. 119:105). We would be ‘in the dark’ if we didn’t have it!

We *know* it is the truth for God is the Author. In His Word, He tells us He planned the moment we would be born, and He has also planned the moment He will take us to Himself. And we would be the most miserable people on earth if we did not believe God is working His plan out for His glory. So, therefore,

Be still, my soul: thy God doth undertake  
To guide the future, as He has the past.  
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;

All now mysterious shall be bright at last.  
 Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know  
 His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.

He has neither lost nor relinquished any of His power, and He never will! There is coming a day when His Son will arrive on this earth, in times when the ungodly will be raging against themselves. They will not be expecting Him ... And when they see Him, they will run but there will be nowhere to hide ... After He has finished with them, He will break the bow and the spear, and He will burn their chariots of war. ... Their swords will be beaten into ploughshares (the sharp blade for cutting through the soil), and their spears into pruninghooks (the long wooden shaft with the curved saw blade on one end), and the nations will not lift their swords against each other, **Is. 2:4** *neither shall they learn war any more.*

That is the God Whose side we are on, before Whom we are told, “Be still”, for, **Rom. 8:31** *If God be for us, who can be against us? 32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

**What are the benefits of being still?** Consider Job in his grief and misery. His wife was no encouragement, his children were dead, his livelihood destroyed, and his company was depressing. He looked, but he couldn’t see God ... Listen to his cries ... He is on his knees, with nowhere to go, **Job 19:6** *Know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net. 7 Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment. 8 He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths. 9 He hath stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head. 10 He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree. 11 He hath also kindled his wrath against me, and he counteth me unto him as one of his enemies.*

... And Job could have run off, sunk into despair, and deserted the Lord, as Satan was trying to trick him into doing. Satan’s purpose is to ‘suck the life’ out of your testimony until you are so drained and drawn away from the Lord. Instead, the Lord’s purpose is for you to find in Him your Refuge and Strength,

Be still, my soul: the hour is hastening on  
 When we shall be forever with the Lord.  
 When disappointment, grief and fear are gone,  
 Sorrow forgot, love’s purest joys restored.  
 Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past  
 All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

It's not always easy but be confident of this ... you will never lose what God has given you because through grace you are His and He is keeping you. Satan can never rob you of your eternal inheritance in Christ! So, be still, and know that the Lord He is God ... and there is no other God like Him for there is no other God. ... There is only one true God Who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is our Saviour. ... **11 The LORD of hosts is with us** ... That is Who is looking after us, so, **II Kings 6:16** *Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.* ... **Ps. 46:11** *The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.* ... Consider how the God of Jacob has kept and is keeping the nation of Israel today ... *He* is the same God Who is keeping you and me also ...

Be still, my soul, the Lord is on thy side.