

FOREVER WITH THE LORD

James Montgomery

This is one of over four hundred hymns written by James Montgomery, who was born in Irvine, Ayrshire on 4th November 1771. At the age of five he moved with his parents to the village of Gracehill in County Antrim, which was a settlement founded by the Moravians in 1765. The Moravians were the followers of the pre-Reformation reformer John Hus (1369-1415), from Prague. It was through the Moravians John and Charles Wesley were converted.

When he was seven years old James was sent to the Moravian Seminary in Yorkshire (www.fulneckschool.co.uk), where he received a good education ... but he had a problem, in that he loved to write poetry, to the detriment of all his other studies. His teachers considered it to be such a distraction he gained the unwelcome reputation among them of being a dreamer. They decided to send him out to work. ... Also, during his school days, his parents went as missionaries to the West Indies, where sadly they died.

So, James was all alone. He first went to work in a bakery, but it was not what he wanted to do ... and he kept writing poetry. He left his job as a baker, and hoped to move into something he more enjoyed. Nothing 'came up' though, and he returned to baking. By this time, he had written many poems, and went to London to find a publisher. However, it did not work out, and he had to return to his bakery job yet again.

Then, at the age of twenty-one, he had an opportunity to go to Sheffield and become an assistant to a Mr. Gales, who was an auctioneer, bookseller, and manager of a newspaper company. Mr. Gales, however, had to abscond from England because of some of his political views proved too controversial, so James filled his position for the next thirty-one years.

He continued to write poetry ... even during a period of three months when he was imprisoned for causing offence in two of his newspaper articles, - one relating to a song commemorating the Fall of the Bastille (14th July 1789), and the second relating to an account of a riot in Sheffield.

Nevertheless, his career accelerated, and he became recognised as an eminent poet, - speaking at many prestigious events across the country, and he was so highly-regarded he was granted an annual royal pension of £200 until his death on 30th April 1854, at the age of eighty-two.

Altogether, out of the four hundred hymns he wrote, more than a hundred remain in use today ... such hymns as “Angels from the realms of glory”, “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire”, “Stand up and bless the Lord, ye people of His choice”, “According to Thy gracious Word, In meek humility, This will I do, my dying Lord, I will remember Thee”.

Another of his most famous hymns is, “Forever with the Lord”, - it was sung at Spurgeon’s funeral. In its original form, it was written in two parts, consisting of twenty-two verses ... and near its conclusion, James Montgomery wrote,

The tomb shall echo deep
That death-awakening sound ...

Then, upward as they fly,
That resurrection-word
Shall be their shout of victory,
“For ever with the Lord!”

It is a beautiful picture the hymn writer presents ... “the bright inheritance of saints, Jerusalem above” ...

So when my latest breath
Breaks through the veil of pain,
By death I shall escape from death,
And life eternal gain.
That resurrection word,
That shout of victory:
Once more, Forever with the Lord!
Amen, so let it be!

In Scripture, this hymn replicates the beautiful imagery of the Bride and the Bridegroom. Originally, in the Old Testament, the Bride is the nation of Israel, and the Bridegroom is Jehovah. In our setting, we can also understand the Bridegroom as the Lord Jesus, and His Bride as the Church. One example of this is near the conclusion of the Book of Revelation, when John the apostle is shown the new Jerusalem, **Rev. 21:9** *And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, **Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.***

What a glorious moment when the Lord Jesus will be reunited with His Bride, His Church! Paul describes it, **I Cor. 15:52** *the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed ... - inside and out. This present *corruptible* human form, - will be replaced by the new and the *incorruptible*,*

Rev. 21:4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away ... for **I Jn. 3:2** we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him ... because we shall **Rom. 8:29** be conformed to the image of his Son.

We shall have a new vocabulary that we don't have here on earth, - we shall see the Glory of God's presence ... for which there aren't any earthly words can describe. John could not adequately express everything he saw – but when we are given our new Heavenly vocabulary, then we *shall* have the *right* words ... And there's some words we have on earth we shall not need any longer. We'll not need any words for “sin” or “Hell” or “grief” or “pain” or sickness, or the “devil” ... God will have erased them from our minds. In Heaven we'll never grow tired of offering praise for what Christ did for us on the cross, and He will never grow weary of listening ... We shall be thanking Him for our salvation, and for His keeping power ... and we'll be changed to be like our Saviour. ...

And yet we shall not lose our identity among the vast multitude gathered there ... and you will be able to recognise them from every tribe, language, people and nation, - there will be no strangers, - and they will all be there because Jesus paid the price for every one of them to be there!

You will be able to understand more than you can now. And nothing will hold you back from learning, **Rom. 11:34** For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? ... ³ In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge .. **Is. 57:15** the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy. God is bigger than forever and it will take eternity **Eph. 3:18** to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; **19** And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge. We shall never stop learning, - eternal students!

Indeed, that takes us further ... here on earth we are not able to fully serve God as we would wish ... but there will be no hindrances in Heaven. There will be no old age, sickness or time factors to restrict us. Everything we do in Glory will be untainted by sin and unfettered by any of our present restraints. ... That is **the Bride of Christ**, as Paul describes, **Eph. 5:25** ... Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; **26** That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, **27** That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. ...

THE BRIDE IS PRECIOUS The Bride of Christ is more precious than any believer can appreciate. Why did Jesus die on the cross for me ... for you? Yes,

I know He died to take away our sins ... *but why?! Why did He do it?! Why did Jesus die the cruel death He chose to die? ... Why did He not die an ordinary death? ... Like James Montgomery, why did He not die peacefully in his sleep at the age of 82? ... He could have been a great Teacher, with a long life, and achieved more earthly fame, but why was it necessary for Him to die on Calvary?*

I can find no answer other than **the Bride is precious** to Him. He does not explain why she is precious, *she just is!* ... In the same way as He doesn't explain how long is 'everlasting'? When did 'everlasting' begin? ... That is how long God has loved you! He did not begin to love you when He saw you beginning to love Him ... He did not begin to love you when He saw something about you that was worthy of His love ... Here is how the Lord explains the reason He saved you, **Jer. 31:3** *Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.* What makes you precious enough for God to draw you to Himself, ... to save you? Again, there is only one answer, **Eph. 2:4** *God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.*

He surely had to love me before I was born, because if His love for me depended upon how I would meet His expectations after being born, I never would have won His heart. I never would have attracted Him to me. No, God looked upon each of His children and He declared in the solitude of Heaven, **Songs 1:15** *Behold, thou art fair, my love ...* **16** *Behold, thou art fair, my beloved.*

At this very moment the Bridegroom is preparing to meet His Bride. Isaiah describes the picture in a lovely way, **Is. 62:5** *as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.* ... When the Son of Man approaches this earth in the clouds of heaven, He will come in all the power and great glory of God (Mt. 24:30) ... **Mt. 24:31** *And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.* ... The Bridegroom is coming for His Bride!

As He looked down the 'corridors of time' He saw you, He set His love upon you, and by His wonderful and irresistible grace He drew you to Himself ... we understand it now ... **I Jn. 4:19** *We love him, because he first loved us.* And today you are precious to Him, and He loves you with a love that none can take away.

You are **precious** to Him on earth, and you will be *privileged* to be with Him in Heaven when He gathers you in His arms, - "My Father's house on high, home of my soul" ... He will take you away into all He has been preparing for you. He will show you round 'the mansion'. He will walk with you and talk with you

as He leads you through the garden, with the pure river of water of life running through it ... and you will see your face reflecting in its waters for they are clear as crystal (Rev. 22). ... When you look into its clear waters you will see the image it mirrors ... and you will not see any spots, or wrinkles, or any such thing because there will be none there (Eph. 5:27)!

He will parade you onto the palace balcony, and the cheers of the angels will be heard throughout the vast expanse! You are more precious than the angels, because Jesus died for you. ... And you won't have to wait for Him to see you, - He will see you straightaway for you belong to His Bride and Prov. 3:15 tells us, *She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.* ... **The Bride is precious.**

THE BRIDE IS PERFECT What makes you so perfect in God's sight? ... It's nothing of you, but it is all of Christ. Jesus looked upon you and He looked through your sin (so beautiful and so clear is His vision), and He saw what you would become in Him. God looked under 'the covers', - and He saw Jesus in you, - He had plans for you from before the foundation of the world. He took you unto Himself, and He did something you could never have done, - nor neither could anyone else, except Him, He saved you from sin, and by His precious blood shed on the cross of Calvary, He washed you clean.

He took you in His hands, - as the potter takes the clay, - ... and He shaped and moulded you to become a glory to His Name, Jeremiah wrote, **Lam. 4:2** *The precious sons of Zion, ... the work of the hands of the potter!* ... "The promise of that faithful word, Lord, here in me fulfil" ... He made all the old things pass away, and you can look back and see how He has changed your life.

If someone told you before you were saved you would love reading the Bible and hearing about God you would not have believed it. ... What is happening is this, ... *as part of the Bride of Christ you are being changed ... perfected!* It is the ongoing process known as sanctification, - the roughness is being polished, the jagged ends are being smoothed. God is working in you to become how He wants you to be to fulfil the function for which He has saved you.

The process won't be finished until you enter Glory, but He is seeing to it that it is in steady progress, and you are being prepared for meeting Him! It could not be done without Him, "Uphold me, Lord, and I shall stand, Through grace I will prevail" ... And because His grace is working in you, you find yourself thinking, "What would Jesus have me do?" ... That is the kind of thinking

belongs to the people in Heaven, - “What would Jesus have me do?” ... for that is your goal, - to be like Him.

And when you are re-united with your loved ones who died in Christ you will all be thinking and talking about Him. He will occupy your every thought. Imagine ... you will never again *do* anything wrong! ... You hate sin, and in Heaven you will never *say* anything wrong, you will never *think* anything wrong, you will never *be* anything wrong. In Christ in Heaven you will be perfect, as Paul explained to the Colossians, [Col. 1:27](#) ... [Christ in you, the hope of glory: 28](#) ... perfect in Christ Jesus ... **The Bride is Precious, the Bride is Perfect, and ...**

THE BRIDE IS PRESENTED Let’s move in further, let’s come before the Throne upon which the Father is seated. The Son, - the Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ, - is ready to present His Bride. ... The Holy Spirit is there too, - He has been looking after the Bride, and preparing her for this moment. ... How the Godhead has waited an eternity for this wedding ceremony, [Songs 6:3](#) **I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine!** The time is ready!

Down through the ages the Son has had to watch from a distance, [Songs 2:9](#) **behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice.** But soon His waiting will be at an end. He will hear His Father’s command to receive His Bride, and without a moment’s hesitation, on that day, there will be a glorious shout from Heaven when He comes to this earth. There will be a noise, - the likes of which has never been heard. Every eye will see Jesus, - even those who despised Him/mockered Him/wouldn’t believe in Him.

But there will be a great intake of breath as God’s children realise their Saviour is coming back for them, - just as He promised, “Forever with the Lord! Amen, so let it be!” ... His Heavenly glory will fill the skies. ... Then those of His people who have died will be raised first, and along with them, those who are His and who are alive on the earth at the time of His coming will rise to meet Him in the air and join the great throng who are with Him. ... He will present you, - as His Bride, - before His Heavenly Father, - “The promise of that faithful word” ... The smile upon her face will only be matched by the smile upon *His* face. This is what both He and she have been waiting for. He has watched her, and He has longed to be with her, - as she has longed to be with Him ... And the moment has finally arrived, “That resurrection word, That shout of victory” ...

And He will bring us to and sit us down at the great table in the dining hall of Glory. He will sit you down in the seat that has *your* name already on it! He will give you to eat from all that is spread before you at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, - like everything else in Glory, prepared by His own hand, "Ah! Then my spirit faints To reach the land I love". Then He will take you into His home and He will show you what He has been preparing for you there, - where you are going to stay, - and you will be with Him forever and ever. That is what Heaven is going to be like; in fact, ... *it's going to be even far better*, for **1 Cor. 2:9** Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

Here we are ... looking at something from God's Word that is going to take place, - as sure as God is on the throne of glory! I know many of you are looking forward to what I have been trying to describe, - you are looking forward to Jesus coming for His Church. I know though that not every believer is taken with this subject. There are some too fond of the things of this world ... There are others who have lost the enthusiasm, - the excitement, the eagerness, - to see Jesus. If you truly love the Lord but your love for Him has recently been on the wane, come back to Him and He will receive you. Come, like the prodigal son, and run ... and He will lift you into His welcoming and open arms.

Maybe you are not saved. You might be trying your best to understand what we have been studying ... but no matter how hard you try, you can't see it ... If you want to be excited about Jesus, you must come to know Him. ... And how do you come to know Him? *Firstly*, know this ... He already knows about you. He knows your life from beginning to end. He knows more about it than you know yourself. He has been bringing you along to the church meetings, and He has kept your attention throughout our studies ... Yes, He knows you.

Secondly, He reaches out His hand of invitation to you, and in His hand there is a precious and priceless gift you would be foolish to refuse. The gift He offers is *particularly* for you. It has your name on it, - He offers *you* His gift of eternal salvation. He reaches out with it ... It is as simple as *that!*

Do you know how much that gift cost? It cost Jesus Christ His life as He died bearing your sins on the cross. It cost His precious blood being shed. It cost the greatest and deepest of agonies ... and it cost Him the forsakenness of His Father, for His Father turned away from His Son so you would be saved! ... It cost Him ... what will it cost you? It will cost you the price of handing over your life to receive Christ as your Saviour and Lord. ... Will you accept Him today?!

What a privilege to be saved and to belong to the **Bride**, who is **Precious** ...
who is being **Perfected** ... and who one day will be **Presented** before the
Throne in Heaven ... the hymn writer wrote,

Uphold me, Lord, and I shall stand,

Through grace I will prevail ...

Once more, Forever with the Lord!

Amen, so let it be!