

Praise of the Lord in His Increase

The Christian life, in its highest and most complete sense, is a living that reflects and expresses the God in whom we believe. To experience and live a normal Christian life, a life that expresses God, we need the Word of God; we also need the hymns of the church. Many hymns cultivate a wealth of spiritual and practical thoughts and feelings that bring our spirit and our heart with our mind, emotion, and will into harmony with God. Hymns develop and promote a deeper, finer, and more intimate fellowship with God, resulting in a living that may be called a God-man living. There are many obstacles to frustrate these finer and more sensitive feelings within us—hindrances which can be removed only through knowing, experiencing, and delighting in the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended God, Jesus Christ our Lord. Contemplating, singing, and speaking hymns often brings us out of our natural concepts and hardness of heart into a fresh and tender enjoyment of Christ.

Hymns differ in their depth and clarity of revelation. Some hymns are light and buoyant in content and feeling; while their impact is shallow and fleeting, they may be effective for momentarily lifting our heart and soul. Other hymns, however, through rich and profound

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In the bos - om of the Fa - ther, Ere the a - ges had be - gun,
 Thou wast in the Fa - ther's glo - ry, God's u - nique be - got - ten Son.
 When to us the Fa - ther gave Thee, Thou in per - son wast the same,
 All the ful - ness of the Fa - ther In the Spir - it to pro - claim.

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| <p>2 By Thy death and resurrection, Thou wast made God's firstborn Son; By Thy life to us imparting, Was Thy duplication done. We, in Thee regenerated, Many sons to God became; Truly as Thy many brethren, We are as Thyself the same.</p> | <p>We were brought forth in Thy nature And the many grains became; As one loaf we all are blended, All Thy fulness to proclaim.</p> |
| <p>3 Once Thou wast the only grain, Lord, Falling to the earth to die, That thru death and resurrection Thou in life may multiply.</p> | <p>4 We're Thy total reproduction, Thy dear Body and Thy Bride, Thine expression and Thy fulness, For Thee ever to abide. We are Thy continuation, Thy life-increase and Thy spread, Thy full growth and Thy rich surplus, One with Thee, our glorious Head.</p> |

utterance, full of divine revelation, infuse us with faith and vision. The more we sing such hymns, the more we see, and the more we see, the more we experience the reality of God in Christ. The hymn that we are considering here, written by Witness Lee, is weighty and fertile in revelation and utterance with a joyful and discerning exultation of the Lord Jesus and His accomplishment of the Father's economic purpose through His incarnation, death, and resurrection. It presents the person of God's incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, the process through which He passed, and the purpose and impact of that process—the producing of the many sons of God, His brothers.

The four stanzas of this hymn develop in sequence: first, the incomparable person of the Son as the eternal only Begotten from the Father, and the essence of His purpose in God's economy—to proclaim all the fullness of the Father; second, the process through which the Son passed—His death and resurrection—to become the firstborn Son and to produce the many sons, His brothers who are His organic duplication among men on the earth; third, the illustration of the organic reality of the process by which He accomplished the multiplication of His life and nature in the believers—the grain of wheat falling into the ground to die; and fourth, the ultimate consummation of the process—the Body of Christ, the bride of Christ, and the church as the eternal abiding place of God; these are the believers in Christ constituted to be His reproduction, expression, fullness, continuation, life-increase, spread, full growth and rich surplus. In these four brief stanzas, the eternal economy of God is marvelously unveiled. We need to sing and speak this hymn often in praise to our wonderful God-man Savior!

This hymn parallels the Gospel of John, if not by design, at least in many essential details, both in expression and substance. Stanza 1 begins, "In the bosom of the Father, / Ere the ages had begun, / Thou wast in the Father's glory, / God's unique begotten Son." This thought is also the thought of John in his Gospel. John begins his revelation of the Lord Jesus by declaring that He is the eternal Word of God who in the beginning, i.e., from eternity past, before "the ages had begun," was with God and was God (1:1-2). This eternal Word is "the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father" (v. 18). Further, he testifies in verse 14 that when Christ came to the earth to live among men, the disciples "beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father." The hymn writer mirrors the expression of the evangelist, praising the Lord Jesus as the only begotten Son of God, who from eternity was in the bosom of the Father and in His glory. This wonderful person has been given to us by the Father as the incarnated Word whom John and the other disciples beheld.

An amazing fact concerning Jesus Christ is affirmed in the second half of the first stanza—when the eternal

Word became flesh in time and lived among men, in His person, His divine essence, He was still the same as He was in the bosom of the Father in the eternal past. We should pause and reflect here for a moment; God became a genuine man, yet in His inward being, He was still the very God, the unique Son of God. Then, in the Spirit He proclaimed the fullness of the Father. The evangelist testifies, "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (v. 18). John pronounces here that the Lord *is*—not *was* as in eternity past but is currently while He is walking on the earth—in the Father's bosom. The Son's declaration of the Father was by the Spirit, implying that the reality of the Father was being conveyed to the disciples by His person, His word, His living, and His shining.

When the disciples were with the Lord Jesus, they were hearing with their ears, seeing with their eyes, and even handling with their hands that which was from the very beginning (1 John 1:1-2). What a marvel, what a mystery! The wonderful person given to us is still the same, possessing and embodying all the fullness of the Godhead, as Paul later declares in his Epistle to the Colossians: "For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell" (1:19). Paul also confirms the full significance of this statement: "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (2:9). When the Lord Jesus was on the earth, He was the walking and talking God—the image of the invisible God made visible!

The manifestation of God in the flesh of Jesus Christ (John 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:16) is not the only mystery associated with the economy of God through His Son. Stanza 2 unveils another astounding fact: "By Thy death and resurrection, / Thou wast made God's firstborn Son; / ...We, in Thee regenerated, / Many sons to God became." Jesus Christ, who is eternally the only begotten Son, came not only to declare the Father to us; He came also to pass through a process. Passing through death and rising again in resurrection, He became God's *firstborn Son*. And another mystery is revealed—in this same process we became the *many brothers* of the Firstborn. The Epistle to the Romans clearly proclaims that the Lord Jesus became the Firstborn among many brothers: "Those

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whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers” (8:29). This reality in the divine purpose is echoed in Hebrews: “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in leading many sons into glory, to make the Author of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (2:10). His suffering of death was a part of His process, and through His death He accomplished a marvelous and eternal redemption; but more astonishing to our natural concept is the vision that by this death He produced many sons of the Father.

If we are able to apprehend and accept by faith the revelation of the Scriptures, we will acknowledge with profound thanksgiving that we, the believers in our dear Lord Jesus, have received the very life of God into our being to make a revolutionizing change in our constitution and life—we are now the *real* sons of God. We emphasize *real* because in our past we may, because of traditional Christian teachings, have spoken of Christians becoming sons of God but without the realization of the reality of our new birth. John declares in the opening of his Gospel, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name, who were begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (1:12-13). We need to receive a life-changing vision of the two mysterious things that happened through the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross and His rising again from death—He became the firstborn Son, and we became His many brothers.

The ultimate result of these awe-inspiring mysteries is further expounded in the same stanza of the hymn: “By Thy life to us imparting, / Was Thy duplication done. / ...Truly as Thy many brethren, / We are as Thyself the same.” We must realize that the operation of God has made us a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). We need to transcend all the human and religious considerations that lead us to believe that redemption and regeneration are merely objective works of God to save us from eternal damnation and to motivate a kind of reformation in our outward manner of living. God in Christ has not called us

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to be improved. He has called us to be reborn! Through the Spirit’s energizing work in us, we receive the divine life and nature to become the same—in life and nature but not in the Godhead—as the firstborn Son, our Brother. In His purely divine essence, He is eternally the only begotten Son, the second of the Divine Trinity in the Godhead. We will never enter into such a relationship with God, but in His economic course of action He has become the model and prototype of the many brothers. In this sense, we are the same as He is, His *duplication*.

Although we receive the revelation in the pure Word of God as indisputable fact, we may nevertheless query, “How can it be that we mere mortal beings could become partakers of the divine life and nature to be the same as the Lord Jesus in His life and nature as the firstborn Son of God?” The third stanza answers our probe. The writer of the hymn turns his attention to the organic significance of the death of Christ, receiving his clue from the utterance of the Lord Himself. Referring to His impending betrayal and crucifixion, “Jesus answered them, saying, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:23-24). He died not only as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world (1:29); He died also as a grain of wheat. The clear implication of the Lord’s utterance is that through His death He would release His life so that the essence and reality of that life would be duplicated in many others, that is, in the *many grains*. Certainly, we realize that the grains produced through the planting of a grain of wheat are not different in substance, appearance, and function from the original grain. The life of the single grain of wheat buried in the ground is dispensed into the plant to produce the many grains in the unchanged likeness of the original grain. Wheat produces wheat, not corn, not barley, and certainly not something inferior in its nature to the original. To deny that we become the replication of our wonderful Savior and dear “big Brother” is to repudiate the purpose that He espouses in this portion of His declared purpose and which He accomplished through His death and resurrection. In fact, the process we see in nature through a planted seed issuing in manifold duplication is an excellent type of the purpose and power of resurrection.

A further aspect of His goal through the spreading and growth of His life in the many grains is articulated in the final two lines of the third stanza: “As one loaf we all are blended, / All Thy fulness to proclaim.” Paul makes reference to the corporate significance of the blending of the many grains in 1 Corinthians. Referring to the bread on the table of the Lord, Paul writes, “Seeing that there is one bread, we who are many are one Body; for we all partake of the one bread” (10:17). We who are many have the joy of partaking of Him personally, but in expression,

the goal of God's salvation is the creation of one organic and genuine expression of the Son in His unique Body of which He is the Head.

With this revelation of the Lord's corporate enlargement in life and expression through His many brothers, the hymn reaches its concluding crescendo, filled with rich and profound worship. We are His *total reproduction*. Through the new birth we have become His duplication. God's joy in bringing us forth as His many sons is not primarily because He loved us or that He desired to display His mercy upon us (though both of these facts are true). His joy and purpose are His increase. Every proper father delights in his increase through the begetting of children; in this aspect every normal father is a reflection of the Father of glory. We are His "pride and joy." We may even say reverently that we are His life-increase. Does God grow? Of course, in Himself He is complete, self-contained, perfect, and unchanging. One verse in the Bible clearly indicates that God can and does grow in His many sons. In Colossians 2:19 Paul indicates that when the members of His Body hold to Christ as the Head, all the Body is richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews and "grows with the growth of God." There are other verses in the Bible that confirm that God is growing through and in the lives of believing Christians. For example, in addition to the several Scriptures we have already cited above related to becoming the sons of God and brothers of the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus states that we are the branches of Himself as the vine (John 15:4-5), and Paul announces that the church is the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:23).

Furthermore, as His increase we are being brought into the oneness and unity of the Triune God to become His corporate expression—His *dear Body* and His *bride*. The oneness of the believers in the Divine Trinity is revealed in John 17, where the Lord Jesus prayed on the eve of His crucifixion,

And I do not ask concerning these only, but concerning those also who believe into Me through their word, that they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that You have sent Me. And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one; I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me. (vv. 20-23)

Notice here that our oneness is defined as "I in them, and You in Me," implying that we are incorporated into that divine oneness. The means by which we are transferred into this oneness is the life of God transmitted into us

when the Spirit enters into us and regenerates us. Through regeneration we receive and are constituted with the divine life of God which is Christ Himself; thus, we become organic members of the corporate Body of Christ. And as Paul proclaims in Ephesians 1:23, this Body is the fullness of the One who fills all and in all.

As the increase of Christ we are also the bride of Christ. The bride too issues from our new birth. Regeneration is for Christ's increase and spread. Very few Christians see that the purpose of regeneration is not merely or even primarily for us to have eternal life. It is for us to become the increase of Christ, consummating in the bride of Christ to match Him as His counterpart for eternity. He came for this purpose. He will obtain His increase by entering into us and making us parts of Himself. As the components of Christ we are joined to and mingled with Christ and one another to become the bride of Christ, His increase. Both redemption and regeneration are for this eternal goal in God's economy.

The description of what we are as the increase of Christ is endless. Item after item begins to pour from the pen of the writer as he specifies what we are. We are His total reproduction. We are His dear Body and bride. We are His expression and fullness. We are His eternal dwelling place—"For Thee ever to abide."

We are also the continuation of Christ, His life-increase, and His spread. We are His full growth and His rich surplus. This is accomplished in us through regeneration, a process by which He enters into us and spreads into our mind, emotion, and will to become the essence of our life to be our living. Therefore, Paul can bear witness: "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). As we open our being to allow Christ to make His home in our hearts (Eph. 3:17), we will experience becoming the same as He is from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18). Then we can with the awe, ecstasy, and triumph of an enlightened heart resound, "We are one with Thee, our glorious Head!"

by Gary Kaiser

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