

God's message has not changed!

Humans crave change. They're easily bored. Entertainment that would seem astonishing to people living just a few years ago, seems humdrum and monotonous to those who've seen what's available to us in modern times. As technology has developed, so too has the expectation. We just need to take television as an example. Shows that were new in the 80's are once again becoming available through Catchup TV, and many of them, not taking into account the picture quality or poor special effects, seem slow and predictable, 2 dimensional we might say. These shows, at the time, were delivered weekly and many families would sit down together to view them (yes, most of the shows back then were able to be viewed by the whole family) and they would be left waiting eagerly for the following week when the next episode would be released. Today, many shows are available for immediate viewing, the whole series being available at once.

Our beliefs and growth in the Truth must compete with this. The difficulty is that in terms of the base material, our Bibles, nothing has changed. **The Truth hasn't changed**, the message hasn't changed, **God hasn't changed**, what Jesus did hasn't changed. We've tried a few things to make presenting our message a little different, but essentially, we still speak to groups of people just as Jesus, the disciples and prophets did thousands of years ago.

Is that wrong? No, I don't believe so. There are those who will say, "but you aren't catering for your audience!" Jesus and John the Baptist spoke in the wilderness and people travelled great distances on foot to hear them. I'm not saying we can't change things, but we need to accept that what we have to offer is never going to be presented in a format that stimulates the senses like modern day entertainment, and nor should it, because that's not the point of what we have to share. We aren't dealing with entertainment. We don't come to the meeting or listen to talks, or do the readings to be entertained, and I think, today, perhaps that is exactly what people expect. **We are here because it's the way of life that we choose to associate ourselves with.** The onus is on us, I believe, to seek out ways to vary the message, to keep it, if not new, at least interesting, to continue to learn and grow in a stimulating way. While the content is the same, we can still seek different angles and different ideas that can challenge our minds and consolidate our faith.



What I'd like to do now is to direct our thoughts to our hymns. We come to the memorial meeting each week and consider the exhortation, we then move on to the breaking of bread, we open and close with a prayer which can be very specific, detailed and relevant. But perhaps what we don't spend enough time considering is that during each memorial meeting we have at least 5 hymns or spiritual songs.

Many people say that they aren't musical, but apart from appreciating the skill involved in the writing or playing of the music to the Lord, for us, that's not what hymns are about. Much thought has been put into the compilation of the words of these pieces to create an exhortational message for us, and or praise to the Lord. The worst thing we can do (as has been said on many occasions) is view them as "a chance to stretch our legs").

We also know that many of the writers of our hymns take direct passages from our scriptures and weave them into the verses to assist us to recall those important lessons on which we base our faith. While singing isn't for everyone, perhaps at the very least, we need to consider how the composer has put the thoughts together and what their intent was.

You may not be aware, because often people comment on the amazing way that the hymns will tie in with the exhortation, but in the week prior, the musician will liaise with the speaker to see if they have hymn preferences or a theme that the players can focus on to enhance the words to be shared.

Each one of these hymns or songs could be seen as a small exhortation to us in itself. Also, **when we sing, we need to remember that we are singing to our God**, so if we aren't taking any note of the words that we are singing, are we truly singing to Him? And if we are taking note of the words, do we mean them? There are those who choose not to sing, just standing while others sing. Is there a message in that choice?

So, in this article I'd like to specifically look at **Hymn 232**. It's a breaking of bread hymn; we know it well, but I wonder how carefully we've considered the words or thought about the story behind it. I personally find it quite confronting, to consider it so we can appreciate the longevity of the message and the purpose of why we're here when compared to the fast paced, entertainment-based lives we live today.

Hymn 232

1 Jesus thou joy of loving hearts,
thou fount of life, thou light of men,
from the best bliss that earth imparts
we turn unfilled to thee again.

This first verse makes a direct connection with the fact that Jesus provides us with both the water of life through our association to him through baptism, but also that he is the purest light of the truth that we read about in our scriptures, being the only man to live a sinless life and therefore providing us with the perfect example of how to live. We then sing in the last 2 lines that no matter what amazing things the world has to offer, our lives are unfulfilled, and we return to seek him and remember him in the emblems constantly. I wonder if we can truly apply that to ourselves?

2 Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood,
thou savest those that on thee call:
to them that seek thee, thou art good;
to them that find thee, all in all.

The second verse begins with one of the points that I make today, that **God's truth never changes**, no matter what part of history we are from. God has in His book of life people from the generations from Bible times to today, the ones who have sought him and acknowledged their failings, relying on his gift of life for salvation. And that he provides all that's needed and protects them throughout their lives.

3 We taste thee, O thou living bread,
and long to feast upon thee still;
we drink of thee, the fountain-head,
and thirst our souls from thee to fill.

Our third verse is all about the acknowledgement of Christ in the emblems. I feel that it's more a plea for assistance to put him and his life's example first, as it's not a natural feeling to act in the selfless way that Jesus acted throughout his life. By filling ourselves with the water of life that he provides, perhaps we can strengthen our resolve to act more like him. Like verse 1, the implication is that we are unfulfilled, and the only way to achieve this is through His supplying these emblems.

4 Our restless spirits yearn for thee,
where'er our changeful lot is cast,
glad when thy gracious smile we see,
blest when our faith can hold thee fast.

Verse 4 appears to be about **the struggle we have as mortals to remain faithful**. The writer acknowledges the restless spirit that is in mortal man. We are constantly restless in the changeful parts of our lives. And yet, at the same time, the faithful can see and enjoy the blessings that come to us each day, and hopefully acknowledge that God has done these things for us. Finally, we again, as mortals realise that the blessings go hand in hand with remaining faithful to the life that we should be living.

5 Lord Jesus, ever with us stay;
make all our moments calm and bright;
chase the dark night of sin away:
shed o'er the world thy holy light.

To end, we have a prayer that we ask Jesus to take to God for us. We seek for constant support, stability and happiness, not the darkness of sin, and finally for the covering of this world with His holiness which can only come with Jesus' return.

This, to me, is a very challenging hymn. It confronts us in that it states openly again and again that we seek these things willingly. Is that really the case? It's the constant issue that man has (and has had) from the very beginning, that living a selfless and sinless life is against our nature.

I'd like to bring these thoughts back to my opening remarks about perspective and accepting that what we do here can't and shouldn't be linked or compared to the world we live in.

I wonder if we see some parts of what we do here as being connected to the issues that the first century church had with the scribes and pharisees. Do we have a perception that some of the things in place are traditions and detract from what we're here for. If so, we need to ensure that we have a very clear understanding as to why we do what we do and that Jesus himself makes clear that he is not against the law that the scribes and pharisees followed so specifically. We read in Matthew 5:17-18, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."

The challenge for us is to not see what we do here as imposing on our rights as an individual. There is a balance between seeing the law as a structure that is meaningless because of the New Covenant and seeing it as a structure that is the basis for the spiritual content behind how we live.

Consider the words of our hymn. Because it was written long ago, is it wrong? Is it outdated? Is it irrelevant? No. Is it challenging? Yes. I suggest that often we override scriptural principles because they are hard or inconvenient, rather than wrong. The readings are a classic example. We read statements in our readings that tell us specifically what we should be doing in our lives and yet we quickly skip on to the next verse without comment.

By doing this, are we making a judgement that the Bible is wrong and we are right? Or are we just pretending these challenging things aren't there because they are just too hard and seemingly unfair?

I believe that by considering this hymn, and indeed, realising the issues that our brothers and sisters in scripture had thousands of years ago, whether in the Old or new testament times, we continue to see the challenges as we try to overcome self and put our faith and the responsibility associated with it first. We need to optimise our time with our brethren, and focus specifically on as much of our gatherings as possible, talks, hymns, prayers, emblems, in order to target the spiritual intent that a true believer should have.

When we come to our gatherings, which are not a huge part of our lives, we need to live in the moment so to speak. Draw from all aspects of our gatherings the spiritual uplift so that we can leave this place, as v3 of hymn 232 says: "having tasted that living bread and drunk of his living water, and our souls therefore, being full".

Andrew Collins

Follow this link to listen to an organ performance (with words) of this hymn.

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/CRwURiYzERl>
