



OUR HYMN OF PRAISE

By Rev. Will Nelken

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The angels *sang* at the birth of Jesus! And their song invaded our planet and stirred the hearts of wondering shepherds, who told the story to everyone they could find. “People *must* know,” they told each other.

The angels’ song still stirs wondering hearts today! And we sing it, again and again, with a variety of tempos and melodies, to our generation and the next.

Glory in the highest!

Glory in the highest!

Glory in the highest, to You, Lord!

(“Glory in the Highest” by Chris Tomlin, Daniel Carson, Ed Cash, Jesse Reeves, Matt Redman)

I stand, I stand in awe of You

I stand, I stand in awe of you

Holy God, to whom all praise is due

I stand in awe of You

(“I Stand in Awe of You” by Mark Altrogge)

Does God give *us* a song, too? He does! In fact, singing is characteristic of God’s people through the ages. It’s more than historical tradition; it’s spiritual compulsion.

Listen to the words of the psalmist (Psalm 40:1-3):

¹ *I waited patiently for the Lord to help me, and He turned to me and heard my cry.*

² *He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire.*

He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along.

³ ***He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God.***

Many will see what He has done and be amazed. They will put their trust in the Lord.

I learned to play the guitar when I was eight or nine. But I had learned to enjoy singing at a younger age. My brother recounts how I would disappear into the bathroom for 45 minutes at a time, while singing my heart out (great acoustics in there!). I picked up the guitar again in junior high school, imagining rock stardom in my future, but it was not to be. I even learned to

play the standup bass (back then, they didn't use guitars in junior high band), but it was just a hobby.

Teenage imagination usually runs in superlatives—best-in-class stardom in whatever your favored hobby or sport may be! Guinness Book of World Records for comic book collections!

There's this built-in need to be recognized as "special" in some way (or many ways). And, to a teenager, "special" looks like super-stardom—or, in Bible terms, defeating Goliath with only a slingshot, or wiping out an entire army of Philistine warriors with only the jawbone of a donkey, or being beaten to the point of death for preaching about Jesus, and getting up to do it again!

In real-world terms, it may look different, but it's the same stuff. When my younger son was asked to write a paper for school, describing what he wanted to be when he grew up, he wrote that he wanted to have a corner office with a view in a downtown office building, with his name on the door. When I asked him, what he saw himself doing there, he told me, "I don't know. It doesn't matter." So, he actually had NO IDEA what he wanted to be when he grew up, only *where* he wanted be, and the esteem and recognition he wanted to receive.

It's something we never grow out of. Even as adults, and until the day we die, we long to be recognized by someone as "special." We sometimes label it as narcissism, but it's really just human; everybody wants it.

In the Western world, where most have more than they need, our efforts turn to giving people everything they want (but have not earned), so that no one feels left out.

It seems, in modern-think, that failing to win the prize for exceptional effort and skill is a stain on our pride, an enormous put-down, the source of all shame—instead of simply an indicator that you were *made for something else*. It has reached the point of absurdity—trophies for mere participation!

Just imagine... Mom walks into her child's bedroom: "Good morning, honey! Oh, look! You're breathing! Aren't you special!"

This foolishness is generating young adults who have no aim, no purpose, no real sense of value in themselves, other than stardom in their own imaginations, measured by "likes" and "retweets" by people they don't really know, in a world that doesn't really care. It's such a fragile house to live in. RANT ENDED.

At age 21, I opened my heart to the possibility of Jesus—not just as a person with real history, but as a person with real divinity. And He came to me, and revealed Himself to me! He gave

me a new song to sing, a song of praise to the Living God! I picked up my guitar again, and started singing to Him... and never stopped!

When Jesus and His disciples had completed their last supper together, they sang a hymn before leaving the room to go to a prayer meeting in a nearby garden.

We have reached the end of the calendar year 2021, and it seems appropriate that we should offer a song of praise to our Lord and Savior before we go into the new year.

Four Verses and a Chorus

And I've found a passage in the New Testament that never fails to release a fresh song in my heart—at the end of Romans 8. I imagine it has four stanzas, based on four questions that Paul put to the church in Rome; questions that also demand an answer from us!

Let me explain, and see if we can “sing” it together today!

The four questions are rhetorical; that means, the readers are expected to answer them the way Paul would. These are such powerful, life-enhancing questions that we *must* be certain of our answers. See if you can pick out the four, as I read the passage.

Romans 8:28-39

²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them. ²⁹ For God knew His people in advance, and He chose them to become like His Son, so that His Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And having chosen them, He called them to come to Him. And having called them, He gave them right standing with Himself. And having given them right standing, He gave them His glory.

³¹ What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ³² Since He did not spare even His own Son but gave Him up for us all, won't He also give us everything else? ³³ Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for His own? No one—for God Himself has given us right standing with Himself. ³⁴ Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and He is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

³⁵ Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean He no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? ³⁶ (As the Scriptures say, “For Your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.”) ³⁷ No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

³⁸ And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. ³⁹ No power in the sky above or in the

earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Did you catch them? Here are the four questions that are to outline our song of praise:

- *If God is for us, who can ever be against us?*
- *Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for His own?*
- *Who then will condemn us?*
- *Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love?*

Verse 1: *If God is for us, who can ever be against us?*

This reminds us that God is not only *with* us, but He is *for* us. He is especially fond of you! He fights your enemies for you. You're never alone, never on your own, never without help.

*And if our God is for us
Then who could ever stop us?
And if our God is with us
Then what could stand against?
What could stand against?
("Our God" by Chris Tomlin)*

Our Good Shepherd guards and provides for His flock. He leads us to lush, green pastures, beside clear, smooth waters.

He towers above us, like a great wall of defense. He protects and defends you. And no one can defeat Him. Therefore, no one can defeat you.

2 Corinthians 4:7-10 (The Living Bible)

But this precious treasure—this light and power that now shine within us—is held in a perishable container, that is, in our weak bodies. Everyone can see that the glorious power within must be from God and is not our own.

We are pressed on every side by troubles, but not crushed and broken. We are perplexed because we don't know why things happen as they do, but we don't give up and quit. We are hunted down, but God never abandons us. We get knocked down, but we get up again and keep going. These bodies of ours are constantly facing death just as Jesus did; so it is clear to all that it is only the living Christ within who keeps us safe.

Verse 2: *Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for His own?*

Not only is God for us in theory, but He stands up for us, when others put us down.

No one likes to receive accusations. And if you want to see someone's blood boil rapidly, just accuse them falsely. But we can bear accusations better, if we know that our family and close friends know the truth about us, if we know that others recognize the lies for what they are.

Accusation is the devil's territory. One of his names is "Accuser of the Brethren." But his accusations to God fall on deaf ears today, because Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. He paid for our sins. In full. To the last penny. Our debt has been cancelled. Our guilt has been cleared.

And since God Himself has chosen you for His own, set His love on you, and called you His righteous child—who would challenge Him?

You have been forgiven by Jesus Christ! Freely. Completely. Forever. Hold your head up! Stand up tall. Live in the freedom with which Christ has set you free. Anyone who makes you their enemy, makes God their enemy, too. Just as anyone who makes you their friend, makes God their friend, too. Jesus said, *"Whoever receives you receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives the One who sent Me."* (Matthew 10:40)

Verse 3: *Who then will condemn us?*

There is only one qualified Judge in the universe—the God who made us all. And, since it was God Himself who arranged for our acquittal, who paid our debt, and who cleared our name—there is no one to render a judgment against us.

"So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)

No condemnation. Hear it! Let it sink in. The only One whose opinion matters, says, *"Neither do I condemn you. I love you. Stop sinning."* Christ—the Judge—died for us and was raised to life for us, and is seated on Heaven's throne for us—praying for us.

No condemnation does not mean you're free to "do whatever pleases you." It means you're free to do what is right, however imperfectly you may do it. It means no more second-guessing yourself. Perfection is not the goal. No more worrying what others may think. Mistakes are allowed. You're free to try again.

Verse 4: *Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love?*

A second question is attached to this, which we also must give our attention to: ***"Does it mean He no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?"***

Our faith is so weak that when trouble comes our way, we leap to the false conclusion that God has turned against us, that He is mad at us, that He no longer likes us.

Does it mean that? Is that what trouble means? Is that what calamity means? Is that what persecution means? Is that what hunger means? Is that what homelessness means? Is that what danger means? Is that what the threat of death means?

Unequivocally, Paul said, “NO!”

Paul was adamant about this. He listed every imaginable category of opposition we might face: death, life, angels, demons, fears, worries, the powers of Hell. Can they do it? Can they cut off God’s love?

What is Paul’s answer? No. Not one. No one.

Like four stanzas in a glorious hymn of praise—

God is for us...

We’ve been forgiven...

There is now no condemnation...

Nothing and no one can separate us from the love of Christ.

Don’t Forget the Chorus

And what’s the chorus? I’m confident it is verse 28: *We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.*

We need to sing that over and over again, until it is firmly planted in our consciousness, deeply rooted in the love of Jesus, and blossoms with confidence in every situation!

Let this be a hymn you sing—God is with me. I’ll forgive like I’ve been forgiven. In Christ, I will never be condemned. And no one can separate me from Jesus’ love. He is always working for my good.

Sing it with great joy!