

Week 2

Arise, My Soul Arise

Devotion by Ruth Rambo



CELEBRATING

Charles Wesley

300 YEARS

1707-2007

ARISE, MY SOUL ARISE

Words: Charles Wesley

1.

Arise, my soul, arise! Shake off thy guilty fears,
The bleeding Sacrifice In my behalf appears.
Before the throne my Surety stands, Before the throne my Surety stands;
My name is written on His hands.

2.

He ever lives above For me to intercede.
His all-redeeming love, His precious blood to plead.
His blood atones for all our race, His blood atones for all our race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

3.

Five bleeding wounds He bears, Received on Calvary.
They pour effectual prayers; they strongly plead for me.
"Forgive him, O, forgive," they cry, "Forgive him, O, forgive," they cry,
"nor let that ransomed sinner die."

4.

The Father hears Him pray, His dear Anointed One,
He cannot turn away The presence of His Son.
His Spirit answers to the blood, His Spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God.

5.

My God is reconciled; His pardoning voice I hear.
He owns me for His child; I can no longer fear.
With confidence I now draw nigh,
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And, "Father, Abba, Father." cry.

Week 2, Day One: Introduction

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“Arise, My Soul, Arise” is the hymn treasure for this week. Six devotionals follow the content of the hymn closely. A TITLE and THEME are chosen from the hymn for each day. The SCRIPTURE portion precedes the TEXT which is a commentary on the content of the hymn. An occasional quotation and reference to another source may be included. A prayer closes each devotional.

*Arise, my soul, arise! Shake off thy guilty fears,
The bleeding Sacrifice In my behalf appears.
Before the throne my Surety stands,
Before the throne my Surety stands;
My name is written on His hands.*

*He ever lives above For me to intercede.
His all-redeeming love, His precious blood to plead.
His blood atones for all our race,
His blood atones for all our race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.*

*Five bleeding wounds He bears, Received on Calvary.
They pour effectual prayers; they strongly plead for me.
“Forgive him, O, forgive,” they cry,
“Forgive him, O, forgive,” they cry,
”nor let that ransomed sinner die.”*

*The Father hears Him pray, His dear Anointed One,
He cannot turn away The presence of His Son.
His Spirit answers to the blood,
His Spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God.*

*My God is reconciled; His pardoning voice I hear.
He owns me for His child; I can no longer fear.
With confidence I now draw nigh,
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Week 2, Day Two: Throne Room Discourse

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Hebrews 10:10

“And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Hebrews 10: 19-20 “...since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.”

Move now to a second image away from the cross and “before the throne.” Jesus stands with His five bleeding wounds exposed and Wesley’s name is written on one of His hands. The discourse of the Trinity here is disclosed throughout the hymn as separate mention is made of the Father, Jesus and the Spirit. Theology, couched in the story in the throne room, writes the Biblical basis for belief in God’s economy and for Jesus being the “dear Anointed One.” Charles Wesley indicated in his 1738 hymn, “And Can It Be” that it was this very throne that Jesus left when he came to earth.

Follow the triune God’s activity in this hymn. God the Father hears God the Son praying and is captured by Him. God the Father speaks words of pardon. God the Son stands before the throne interceding with God the Father for us always. God the Son sprinkles His blood while His wounds speak for us. God the Spirit answers to the blood and speaks to Wesley that the blood of God the Son is enough. Wesley hears the voice of God the Father speaking ownership of him.

A good beginning for each day is suggested by this interplay. All is well because provision has been made for our sins before the throne of grace, His Father’s throne.

In this hymn, Wesley takes us into God’s presence, in the throne room, where a vital transaction

occurs. Three parties are dominant: Jesus, the Son and “bleeding sacrifice,” the Father to be reconciled and Wesley, the needy pleading one. This triangle is undoubtedly meant by Wesley to represent us as well. Sing it as a personal statement so when the denouement in the hymn arrives, the triumphant tone heralds your release as well as Wesley’s. The solution to our sin problem and the outcome of the dramatic work on the cross is caught in the new relationship that the sinner has with the God to be reconciled—we may call him, “Father.”

Wesley’s soul is treated as something to be aroused out of darkness—the darkness is of fear and guilt. Wesley’s quaint language gives fresh power to pilgrims of today if we get the meaning of his words. True, we don’t say “arise” or use “surety,” but rather we call another to “get up” and we might say a “sure solution” for something that is a dilemma.

Surety means a person who engages to be responsible for the debt, default, or miscarriage of another and is “that which gives security or confidence; ground or basis of certainty or security.”

In other words, Jesus is our “sponsor.” Wesley is singing out his soul sense at what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called “costly grace.” Costly because it cost Jesus his life and grace because it gave Wesley freedom from guilt and fear.

Prayer

Father, we share the same need as Charles Wesley. By your grace, we are humbly aware of Jesus’ passion as necessary to give us entrance to your throne room each day. Thank you that our names have been represented to you on His hand and our needs are being brought to you by Jesus as He intercedes for us. Amen.

Week 2, Day Three: Get Up and Shake

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I Peter 2:24

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”

“Arise, My Soul” is a bloody hymn. Writing it on crimson paper or filmed with a bleeding heart pumping a flowing stream of red may seem appropriate. From the opening word, movement characterizes this hymn. Post modern humankind may find it uncomfortable to be given an invitation to arise or to be seen to need provision for a sinful state of being. If we could think into Charles Wesley’s mind and emotion during his time, what may a focus on the blood look like? The movement of his soul out of a sleeping state to observe the flow of blood from a sacrifice which pleads and atones and then is actually sprinkled seemed essential to him.

Mel Gibson’s film, “The Passion,” spoke powerfully to many because of the element of wounding and bleeding that we were forced to endure. Taking ownership of the implication that we were partly responsible for that was a chilling part for many film viewers. We watched the “five bleeding wounds” being inflicted and felt strange.

Why was such a startling command needed by the way? Wesley suggests that in a metaphorical sense his soul was asleep and needed to be aroused out of the darkness. Wesley wrote of a phenomenon termed “soul arousal.” Perhaps he was wading

in a stream of worry, lying in a pool of shame or floating around in a lake of guilt and knew that he needed to shake it all off. He knew that he needed to get a grip on life so he talked to himself—told his soul to get up.

A post operative patient must be challenged to get out of bed and take the first step toward rehabilitation. The confidence quotient is lowered by anesthesia and pain medication so that even the most mature responsible adult becomes like a baby taking the first step. Yet getting up is an essential part of the care plan toward wellness. No one else could stand in as a substitute for that action. The step of soul arousal is highly individual and the human part of the drama in this hymn. The action is vital to enter into a new realization and behavior. Wesley’s “Arise” is timely and helpful. From human guilt and fear, he was moved to being born of God and owned as His child. The “no longer” of fear unwraps the redemptive movement of the hymn.

God’s initiative of grace on Wesley’s behalf underlies all five of the stanzas, but his penitence is owned in phrases like “in my behalf,” “name is written” and “ransomed sinner.” He knows by experience about God’s justice and mercy.

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, have mercy on us. We know that your blood will never lose power in the throne room to sacrifice for our sins. Thank you for the scenes in this hymn that make the transactions more vivid. Your awakened children say “Amen.”

Week 2, Day Four: Divine Love and Human Fear

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John 15:12,13

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life...”

“C’mon, Charlie. Get up!” “Awaken to divine love’s plan for you.”

Accept this paraphrase into a theme which is difficult to grasp. The call of this hymn is to recognize the drama of God’s love even though the only reference to agape love is “all redeeming love.” The work of love is felt throughout and is endearingly directed to Jesus here as being “His dear Anointed One.”

The unselfish love which I have for three daughters feels as though it couldn’t be surpassed. The awareness is also that love for each one is individual and unconditional. But divine love surpasses all other loves in that it is truly unselfish. Therefore, our love falls short even as immense as we feel it to be. The best of human love doesn’t ordinarily beget fear, but it may. Divine love does not.

Human fear—our deep fear—is that divine love isn’t a possibility for each human being to the extent of our need. Our surety is that His love just couldn’t be enough for us. We humans avoid an encounter with the one who promises to provide such a love. While Wesley writes passionately to convince himself and us of the divine love which negates human fear, even his language limits the extent to which we can understand. The “Spirit answers to the blood and tells me I am born of God” is so incomprehensible that we can remain in our fear.

Imagine some of these fearful human extremities and the answer to them:

The charitable and faithful labors of persons in a church erupt into a situation called a church split. Yet “arise.”

Vows of “until death do us part” become a married couple’s vacant echo of faded idealism as they sign divorce papers. Yet “arise.”

Careful budgets and moderate spending tally up to lack of funds at the point of retiral. Yet “arise.” Four degrees from prestige schools but his memory blocks the name of his daughter of forty-seven years. Yet “arise.”

Hours of prayer and careful parenting reap a proud and selfishly ambitious child who betrays his parents. Yet “arise” and shake it off. All off!

Wesley’s succumbs to the divine love and describes this movement in the last two lines as he draws closer while uttering a cry to His Father. The scene is touching as we think of Charles Wesley with arms open wide stepping closer to the one from whom He accepts full free love.

The divine love remains beyond death and moves us into life without fear and guilt. Jesus Christ nailed to the cross is divine love sufficient for our human fear and every form of darkness. Jesus assured this fully in His “It is finished,” declaration.

Prayer

Oh, Divine Love, breathe renewed confidence into my soul. I do not need to fear or carry guilt. Awaken me to the breath of life and love which Jesus redemption affords. Amen.

Week 2, Day Five: Death and the Body

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Scripture

Jeremiah 31:3b, Exodus 34:7b, Isaiah 53:6, Hebrews 4:15, Hebrews 9:12-14 and I Peter 1:18 form the basis for the text which follows. Isaiah's passage is key. "And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Another surety of life is death which is the theme for this devotional time. The body dies—this body so important in Biblical thought. In this hymn, Wesley mentions several of the body parts or functions of God, soul, hands and voice. He affirms a point of similarity between God's person and elements of the human body. When God created humankind in His own image, He longed for fellowship with that being like Him. A broken relationship demanded the narrative told in this hymn. The substance of the activity described by Charles Wesley—a living relationship from a dead body—is core to his seeming state of wonder.

God is merciful and just, therefore God's very character demands a sacrifice. Though He doesn't want to punish humankind for sin, He must because of who He is. His character and our plight result in the scene that Wesley draws us into—the scene of a hill or the "place of the skull."

The act of faith occurs in the hymn's movement. God loves us with an everlasting love. Yet God will not clear the guilty because God is a just judge. The scene of the hymn writer was hinted to by the prophet Isaiah—every one of us strayed away yet God laid on Jesus our guilt and our sins.

Jesus was the perfect priest who had never sinned, so He was able to fulfill all of the sacrificial requirements of the law. Everything needed for a restored relationship between the Creator and created permitted Wesley to cry "Father, Abba, Father."

Celebrative in tone yet the hymn's celebration message is severe. Our great need and his grand provision are powerfully expressed in this rousing piece. After a period of meditating on these words in preparation for writing, the five stanzas have flooded my awareness for two months at various points of the day. The lift of the command to "shake off thy guilty fears" arouses us.

The word to rejoice in the truth that "my God is reconciled" is a loud affirmation of "saving grace."

The great mystery of this is a challenge to our personhood each time we come to the communion table. We want to know how much is demanded of us. Will it cost too much? The precious Spirit who carried the voice of one part of the Godhead to another will orchestrate the sanctifying work within us as we are broken and poured out in celebration of Christ's atoning work.

Prayer

"Grant, O Lord, that in your wounds I may find my safety, in your stripes my cure, in your pain my peace, in your Cross my victory, in your Resurrection my triumph, and a crown of righteousness in the glories of your eternal kingdom."

Jeremy Taylor in The Westminster Collection of Christian Prayers

Week 2, Day Six: The Great Story for All Our Race

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I Peter 2:24

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...

The missional emphasis of the hymn is evident because one hears clearly the concluding suggestion that this provision is “for all our race.” Every human being is included in this grace “offered once and for all.” This final theme in the grand story, “salvation is for all humanity,” stands as the central theme of the cross, and the cry of the one on the cross.

In my reading of Oswald Chambers, I was reminded that the “Cross is the central event in time and eternity and the answer to all the problems of both.” What Jesus Christ accomplished on the Cross made it possible for the entire human race to be brought back into a right-standing with God. He made a way for every person to have fellowship with God because it was His purpose for coming to earth in the first place. The purpose of the Incarnation was the redemption of the whole human race.

The great heart of God absorbed all of the cost and pain of humankind’s fallen nature. Wesley dramatized in this hymn the response for one lost human being in order to show the way for all. Jesus stayed at the task that the Father sent Him to accomplish and remains at that task even to today according to Wesley’s words. An expansive view of the Godhead is projected here to help us to think expansively about God.

In God’s great story, the overarching narrative of all time, the Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. In this hymn, Charles Wesley indicates that Jesus

willingly sacrificed on his behalf and ours—“for the sheep.” Belief that such a transaction can have efficacy for Wesley in the 1700’s and for us 2000 years later is a gift from the Father Himself, the author of the story. “...for the sheep,” Jesus entered the pit of death where every vile thing ever existing is said to dwell. We only know partial darkness when our sinful nature is operative, but He knew the full extent of all darkness in the grave and for three days according to the measure of earth’s time.

“On my behalf” was Wesley’s statement of personal ownership of his pitiful and needy state. Was he too gentlemanly to include us and write “on our behalf”? He owned the utter despair of Good Friday.

An accusation exists that the Christian church glides too quickly to the resurrection Sunday and defies long focus on the darkness of the middle period between the events. This crucifixion scene which Wesley is entering so fully does not take us into the depths of hell. Likewise Wesley does not move ahead to the glorious morning of Jesus’ resurrection in this hymn. One could wish that he would have included a stanza on Holy Saturday in order to comprehend even more the suffering Saviour. Yet perhaps that wouldn’t have been song worthy. Would it have been cacophony only or unimaginable sound beyond description? Wesley’s inspired piece moves us from a rousing trumpet call in the morning to a full choir of grateful and repentant voices in the end claiming a loving place in the Father’s presence.

Prayer

Dear Creator & Lover of all humanity, we gratefully sing the AMEN to this great story of atonement and assurance!