**Sun of My Soul**

So far during my time at Jackson Heights, I haven’t had much success with maintaining sermon series. However, despite this dismal track record, I remain undeterred, and I’m going to launch another one that hopefully will appear periodically. From time to time, I want to spend a sermon taking an in-depth look at one of the great hymns in our repertoire.

I think this exercise is valuable for several reasons. First, it reminds us that we are supposed to sing with understanding, that we are supposed to think about the hymns that we sing, and that the hymns we sing are supposed to be worthy of thought. Second, I know there are brethren who absolutely hated high-school English class and wouldn’t mind the help in decoding what some of our more obscure hymns are saying. Third, even if the thoughts of these hymns weren’t contained in a hymn, they’d still be worthy of a sermon on their own, and we can benefit from contemplating them. With these things in mind, then, let’s turn our attention to the stellar “Sun of My Soul”.

The first verse of this hymn is about JESUS, OUR SUN. Let’s read it together. I’m no expert in the original languages of the Bible, but I do know that in the original, there are many wordplays that don’t translate well. This is one of the few instances of a wordplay that isn’t present in the original but does work in English. Jesus is the S-o-n of God, but He is also the s-u-n of our souls. Look, for instance, at His prophetic description in Malachi 4:1-2. The coming of the Lord is like a destructive fire for evildoers, but for the godly, it is like the rising of a sun of righteousness.

This is all the more important because now that the Son of God has risen, He will never set. As the song says, there can be no night for us when our Savior is near. Here, we find a clue about the intended setting of the hymn. It’s what’s called an evensong, a song designed to be sung at evening. When we sing this together at this time, we are insisting that even though earthly night is falling outside, because of Christ our light, we will never walk in darkness.

As the hymn notes, though, there is an exception to this rule. It appears when an “earthborn cloud” arises to hide Jesus from us. This is not the clearest line in the hymn, but I think we can understand what it’s talking about when we consider 2 Corinthians 4:3-4.

In this text, Paul describes the devil as blinding the minds of the unbelieving, so that they can’t see the glory of Jesus. That’s what this part of “Sun of My Soul” is talking about. Because Jesus sheds spiritual light in our lives, His radiance can be blocked by spiritual problems.

This problem can take many forms. It could be that we are so intent on practicing some sin that out of shame, we refuse to look to Jesus. We can have reached a point in our lives where we are so busy that we don’t have the time or energy to look to Him. We may be surrounded by family and friends who want us to turn our eyes somewhere else. Regardless, once Jesus is hidden from us, we can no longer walk in His light, and that’s the last thing that we want!

The second verse is about RESTING WITH OUR SAVIOR. Once again, let’s read it together. This is another verse in which the hymn’s suitability as an evening song shines through. I suppose we could sing this at any time of day, but it is most meaningful when we know that in just a few hours, we will be going to bed and going to sleep. That’s the only point those first two lines are making. They show that the rest of the verse will be about going to sleep.

The so-what only shows up in the third and fourth lines. They are asking for Jesus’ help, so that as we’re drifting off to sleep, our last thoughts will be of spending eternity with Him. There’s a lot to unpack here, particularly because the author is using and implying more wordplay. Just as the s-u-n is a stand-in for the S-o-n, so sleep in this hymn, something most of us do every night, is used as a stand-in for the sleep of death.

I’m sure every parent here has noticed that babies don’t like to go to sleep. Even though they’re tired and cranky and miserable, they will fight it as hard as they can and do whatever they can to stay awake. Sleep is still an unfamiliar thing for them, so they’re afraid of it. However, as we get older and become more familiar with sleep, we learn to welcome it and the rest that it brings.

Here’s what the author wants us to think about. He wants us to reflect that just as sleep can teach us about sleep, so too it can teach us about death. In both cases, we lose consciousness. Like babies are afraid of sleep, we’re afraid of death—because it’s not familiar, because we don’t know what will happen.

However, like the thought of rest causes us to develop a positive attitude toward sleep, we ought to develop a more positive attitude toward death too, once again because of the thought of rest. Look here at Revelation 14:13. It is a blessed thing to die in the Lord! We’ve served Him here, so death for us means that we will get to rest with Him there. The rest that we get when we go to sleep is nothing compared to the rest that we will enjoy after we go to sleep for the last time, and every one of us will profit from reflecting on the sweetness that rest.

The third verse is about LIVING AND DYING WITH JESUS. Let’s take a moment to read it together. Once again, the wordplay continues, taking advantage of the hymn’s logical setting at a particular point of a 24-hour day. As the sun rises and sets each day, we can also say that the sun rises and sets on our lives. In the morning of our lives, we’re young. In the evening of our lives, we’ve grown older. Finally, when the night of our lives is near, we’re close to death.

The author wants us to understand that throughout this life-day, there is never a point when we can do without Jesus. Through the majority of our lives, we can’t live without Him. Consider, for instance, Peter’s reaction in John 6:66-68. There’s lots that Peter doesn’t know, but he knows that he doesn’t want to try life without the Lord.

How true that is! Throughout our lives, Jesus does so much for us. He guides our path with His wisdom. He intercedes for us with the Father. He comforts us and gives us hope when times are hard. I’m here to tell you, friends—with all I’ve gone through in my life, I can’t imagine how I would have made it through without Jesus. I rely on Him completely. Every Christian does.

However, if we think living without Jesus is hard, consider what it must be like to die without Him! Consider the greatness of the promise that He makes in John 11:25-26. This is why we’re here, folks—because we believe that Jesus can deliver on this promise of eternal life. His resurrection shows that we can have confidence in our own resurrections.

If we didn’t have that hope, though, we would have nothing. Without that hope, every one of our lives is a tragedy, and the closer we get to the end, the more tragic they become, as old age and death cruelly take away everything we once enjoyed. The best we can hope for is eternal annihilation. Brethren, as with all of us, there’s a part of me that fears death, but that fear is nothing next to the terror that I would feel if I thought that death was truly the end. Who could dare to die without Jesus?

The last verse of the hymn calls us to consider WAKING AND HEAVEN. Once again, let’s read it together. I know that some people have trouble understanding the hymn, and I think one of the reasons for that difficulty is the way that it switches back and forth between literal night and day and metaphorical night and day. In this verse, we’re back to literal again. We ask God’s blessing on us as we make our way through the world after we wake up. This isn’t talking about resurrection. It’s talking about getting out of bed in the morning. Once again, that’s a logical thing to think about in the evening before we go to bed. Certainly, we would like God to bless us tomorrow and through all our tomorrows.

However, the waking that we truly anticipate isn’t the waking up to another day of earthly life. It’s waking up to an eternity of joy in heaven. There are lots of possible ways to describe heaven, but here, the author chose to depict it as an ocean of love in which we can lose ourselves forever.

What a magnificent thought! It reminds me of John 17:24-26. Here, Jesus is appealing to the Father to bring us to live together with Him, where we can spend eternity beholding the glory of the Father’s perfect love. What’s more, heaven will be the conclusion of Jesus’ work in us. In v. 26, He tells us that His desire for us is for the love of the Father to dwell in us too.

Here on earth, I am constantly reminded that I’m about a million miles away from having the Father’s love perfected in me. When you get right down to it, I’m too stinkin’ self-centered to love as constantly as He does! In heaven, though, all that will drop away. There will be no more temptation, no more fear, no more obstacles between me and the completion of Jesus’ wonderful work. In that day, there will be nothing of my selfish nature left. There will only be Christ.

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