

A Heart From Sin Set Free

by Herbert McGonigle

Charles Wesley's hymns, numbering over 8,500, emphasize universal grace, the witness of the Spirit, and Christian holiness.

Duration: 57:41

Scripture: Genesis 1:1, Leviticus 6:13, Matthew 1:1, Titus 2:11, Philemon 1:1, 2 John 1:1

Topics: "Freedom From Sin"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on the television series 'Peyton Place' and its clever sales technique of leaving viewers hanging, comparing it to the anticipation of future episodes of his own preaching. He then focuses on the theme of universal redemption and Christian holiness, emphasizing that the invitation to salvation is for all people. The preacher also discusses the witness of the Spirit and the assurance of sins forgiven, drawing from the experiences of John and Charles Wesley. The sermon concludes with a call to seek the truth of God and be filled with the fullness of God as redeemed believers.

Transcript

What we heard and entered into in our last session, for the glorious, precious blood of Christ, that absolutely testifies in our hearts, everything is finished, all provision is made, and we can enter in, in all the fullness of that to which you have called us. We want now to ask you to come again and minister to our hearts. We pray for our brother as he comes and shares.

Let the Spirit of God, as yesterday, minister to our hearts again today. And above all else as we listen, will you please, Blessed Spirit, exalt Jesus Christ in all our hearts until He fills up all our horizons, until He captivates all our hearts, until everything within us shouts glory to His name. We want to say again to you, Lord, that we love you.

We marvel at you. We delight in you. You are everything to us.

But we recognize we have a huge capacity to become bigger, to expand in our understandings, to grow in grace. And we ask you that you minister to us now and bring us into greater fullness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Please sit down. Years ago, there was a long-running television series called Peyton Place. I know nothing about it.

I remember hearing of it. It's true! And they used to leave you hanging, waiting for the next episode. It's clever sort of sales technique, isn't it? You've got to come back for episode 2. Well, I'm looking forward to episode 2 and 3 and 4. Brother, thank you ever so much.

Thank you. Well, I know nothing about Peyton Place either. I'm trying to work out that answer.

Thank you. OK. You know, maybe we should be glad that we just had 9 verses.

The original has 36. So, great joy to be here this morning. The Lord has already ministered so richly to us.

And as Paul was reminding us of those great passages in 1 John about the cross and the atonement and the blood of Jesus, I was remembering that across his long ministry of more than 50 years, Charles Wesley became pre-eminently the poet of the cross, the poet of the atonement. For him, the burning focus of faith, of all Christian doctrine, turns on the great medieval question, Why the God-man? Why Jesus came? And especially, why He died? Amazing love! How can it be that Thou, my God, should die for me? We reminded ourselves yesterday morning that Charles was John's younger brother. And most younger brothers have a problem with older brothers.

Charles didn't especially, except that for 250 years, Charles has lived in the shadow of his more famous brother. I mean, among Christians, you only have to say the word Wesley, and everybody assumes you mean John. But really, Charles' influence has been wider, more comprehensive, and longer enduring than John.

Let me give you a simple test. I thought of asking you to raise your hand, but I won't. Of this gathering of well-informed Christian people, how many of you have read one of John Wesley's sermons in the last four weeks? Ah, that's the answer.

By comparison, how many of Charles' hymns have you been singing have we been singing ever since we became Christians? And not just in English. I've made a number of visits to Japan. I don't speak Japanese, I wish I did.

And there, worshipping in Japan, I couldn't understand the words they were singing, but I recognized, and can it be, and Jesus, lover of my soul, because they used to sing in tunes, the tunes are universal, they sang in Japanese, I was singing in English, and I was reminded that the hymns of Charles have gone round the world. There is hardly any gathering, with a very few exceptions, those that don't sing hymns at all. Otherwise, Charles' hymns are sung by all the people of God all over the world.

If I used a simple illustration, if I was to be given one pound for every John Wesley sermon that will be read next weekend, I would be no better off than I am now. But if I was to be given a pound for every Charles Wesley hymn that will be sung around the world over the coming weekend, probably I would be very well off. The most prolific hymn writer in the history of the Church, across exactly 50 years, 8,500 hymns, give 10 or 20 either way, came from his pen.

Now that makes Charles Wesley, please note this, the most prolific poet in the English language. Charles Wesley wrote more verse than Shakespeare or Milton or Dryden or any of the English poets in terms of the sheer volume. He was writing for 50 years.

Now, we like to work things out as percentages. So, if across 50 years he wrote 8,500 hymns, he was writing one hymn every two and a half days, of every week, of every month, of every year, for 50 years. Or

if you like to see him slightly differently, he was writing 10 lines of poetry every day, every week, every month, every year, for 50 years.

But you see, there is something very important. On that Pentecost morning, the Whitsun morning, of the 21st of May, 1738, when Charles Wesley experienced his evangelical conversion, three days before Brother John, already set in motion were all those years spent in classical study. The years Charles Wesley spent at Westminster School in England made him a budding poet.

Most of these years were spent in translating Greek and Latin poetry into English and translating English into Greek and Latin. Charles Wesley was a master craftsman. He knew about rhyme, he knew about rhythm, he knew about meter, and he knew about scan.

Four things strangely absent, I noticed, in a lot of contemporary hymn singing. But never mind. So, when on that Pentecost morning, he was touched and transformed by the Spirit of God significantly on Whitsun morning, the Holy Spirit made him a scripture poet.

For the next 50 years, converted in 1738, dying in 1788, 50 years of ministry. And while we are mostly thinking this morning, of course, of the hymns, for the first 17 years of the revival, Charles was an antediluvian preacher, like his brother, read the journal. Charles travelled as many miles, preached as many sermons, and saw as many converts as either his brother John or George Whitfield.

He was very popular. He took Methodism to Ireland. He was the first to cross the Paymaw, and take the revival into Cornwall.

And all those years of travelling, he was writing, writing, writing. Then, having married and settled down in Bristol and in London, preaching just in those areas, he began then to work systematically on the Bible. He began in the book of Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

And he wrote a hymn on that. He worked all his way systematically through the 39 books of the Old Testament, and produced 1,609 hymns on the Old Testament alone. He composed 226 hymns on the book of Isaiah alone.

And as he was moving his way systematically, he came to the book of Leviticus. When did you last hear someone preach from the book of Leviticus? Well, he came to chapter 6, that great chapter that tells about, you know, the daily Ola, the burned offering, the fire shall ever be upon the altar, it shall never go out. Which was the biblical text and inspiration for that great hymn we sang earlier.

O thou who camest from above, the pure celestial fire to impart, kindle a flame of sacred love on the mean altar of my heart, there let it for thy glory burn with inextinguishable blaze. So systematically, he made his way from Genesis to Malachi. 1,609 hymns.

Well, you can guess, can't you, what he did then? Yes. He started at Matthew 1.1, the book of the generations of Jesus Christ, and he made a hymn on just those words. And he worked his way from Matthew through the 27 books of the New Testament, even books like Philemon and 2 and 3 John, the smallest book, clear through to the Apocalypse, producing 3,491 hymns on the New Testament.

And if you remember the figure I gave you for the old 1,609, add on 3,491, you get 5,100 hymns based directly on the text of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Now I'll give you just one other illustration of

what happened as he worked through systematically. He came to that great account of our Lord's crucifixion in John's Gospel.

And John is the only evangelist of the four who, in recounting the seven words of the cross, gives us our Lord's final cry, Tetelestai! It is finished! It is finished! Those words in John 19 are the inspiration for what I believe is one of the greatest hymns in the language we have on the atonement. You have it in your book. By the way, most of the hymns I'll use today, by way of illustration, most of them are in hymns of eternal truth.

It is finished. The Messiah dies. Cut off for sins.

That cut off, by the way, is straight from Daniel 9. The Messiah shall be cut off. Remember that? But not for his own. Cut off for sins, but not his own.

Accomplished is the sacrifice. The great redeeming work is done. The count is finished.

All the debt is paid. Justice divine is satisfied. The grand and full atonement made.

God, for a guilty world, has died. Now, I want to tell you that in those 5,100 hymns that came from this systematic study of Scripture, the great hymns like, and can it be, O for a thousand tongues, they have already been written. So by the time we add up, the 5,100 based directly on the Scriptures, with all the other hymns, the final figure is approximately 8,500.

And that gives you one hymn every two and a half days. I am sure he did not write like that. There were days when he wrote less.

There were days when he wrote more. But if you produce 8,500 hymns in 50 years, it works out. Now, somebody is going to ask, I hope you will, how long were the hymns? Well, how long is a piece of string? Charles Wesley wrote some great hymns of one stanza.

One verse. But he wrote many longer than that. God of all power and truth and grace, based, by the way, on Ezekiel 36.

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean. 36 stanzas. The longest Charles Wesley hymn I have found is his exposition of Hebrews chapter 11.

It has 85. I assure you it is true. It has 85 verses.

So from one verse to the hymn of 85, you know, whatever the average works out to be. In other words, the Spirit of God touched him. And out of all the natural gifts, the gifts he had cultivated in writing poetry at Westminster School, Charles Wesley was a good poet before his conversion.

His conversion made him a Christian poet. After that, practically all he wrote was based on Scripture. Years ago I heard that great Yorkshire evangelist, Leonard Ravenhill, say this.

Some of you remember the name. Some of you have read Ravenhill's books. He said, Charles took the doctrines of Scripture and his brother John, and turned the doctrines into verse.

He altered the beat, but not the heat. And there is a lot of truth in that. But you see, he had the natural gifts, now inspired by the Spirit.

Had he not become a Christian, Charles Wesley would have been a great national poet. He had the gifts of poetry. He really knew how to write poetry.

He knew how to write meter. He knew how to scan. You can turn into any collection of Wesley's hymns that you can find, including your own book.

And I defy you to find a line that doesn't scan. I mean compared with the line before it and the line after it. Some poets can scan one line and miss the other three.

He can scan all four. And he can work in some of the longest, long syllabled words. Help us, Thy mercy to extol immense, unfathomed, unconfined.

He can scan words. But he is always dealing with Scripture doctrine. Now I want to mention very briefly that across that amazing production, there are three themes that are constant.

Our brother Norman mentioned last night that very rare source the thirteen volumes of the poetical works of John and Charles Wesley edited by George Osborne in the 1860s. Very, very difficult to find. From the time I first discovered as a student that it existed I searched for fifteen years before I found the fact, the thirteen volumes.

When I got them, they were actually quite cheap, but when I got them, whoever had them hadn't used them very much because many of the pages I had to split open with a pen knife. Wonderful. Then when I came to the college where I am now at 1976, 31 years ago, I began looking for a set for the college library.

And I searched and looked for 26 years and only found them six years ago in 2001. So across 40 odd years, I've ever only seen two sets of the thirteen volumes for sale. But I have to tell you that should you be fortunate enough to find the thirteen volumes, George Osborne, a Wesleyan minister in the 1860s, compiled the thirteen volumes, but since his death until now, a lot more of Charles' verse has been discovered.

And if you look carefully, today you will find three more volumes entitled Charles Wesley's Previously Unpublished Verse. And when I added the thirteen volumes and the three with the letter counting, the total number is about 8,500 hymns. Now here are the three themes that are found across all the hymns.

The theme of universal grace. God loved the world and sent His Son to die. Not for our sins only, as we heard this morning, but for the sins of the whole world.

And of that great hymn that he wrote in 1739, the hymn entitled A Hymn for the Anniversary Day of One's Conversion, which we normally begin at, oh, for a thousand tongues, the great climactic verse is this truth. See all your sins on Jesus' leg. The Lamb of God was slain.

His soul was once an offering made for every soul of man. Universal grace. To Him He used a lot Himself in His own ministry.

Come sinners to the gospel feast, based on Matthew 22. Come sinners to the gospel feast. Let every soul be Jesus' guest.

You need not one be left behind. Why? For God hath bidden all mankind, sent by my Lord, on you I call. The invitation is to all.

Oh, for a trumpet voice on all the world to call to bid their hearts rejoice in Him who died for all. The great constant theme, hallelujah, of universal grace. God loved the world, not part of it.

Christ died for all, not just for some. The second theme, the witness of the Spirit. You remember how John didn't understand what his father meant? By the inward witness, both the Wesley brothers, Charles on which Sunday, John on the Wednesday, found the assurance of sins forgiven.

Spirit of faith, come down. Reveal the things of God made to us that God had known. And witness with the blood.

Design the blood to apply and give us eyes to see who did for every sinner die. Hath surely died for me. Inspire the living faith which whosoever receives the witness in himself, he hath and consciously believes.

If I was ever forced into a corner and had to make a top ten, you know, out of eight and a half thousand, it would be a very difficult choice probably for most of you as well. But there is one hymn that I would certainly put in the ten. And I would put it very near the top.

That great and wonderful hymn. We don't have many in the English language that deal with the high priesthood of Jesus. Bearing the marks, pleading for us before the throne.

Arise, my soul, arise. Shake off thy guilty fears. The bleeding sacrifice in my behalf appears.

Before the throne my surety. The word from Hebrew. Before the throne my surety stands.

My name is written on His hands. He ever lives above for me to intercede. Five bleeding wounds He bears received on Calvary.

The poor effectual prayers they strongly plead for me. Dear friends, this morning, our risen, glorified Jesus is praying for us at the right hand of the Father. Forgive Him, O forgive me, Christ.

Nor let that ransomed sinner die. The Father hears Him pray. His dear anointed One.

He cannot turn away. The presence of His Son. And then these two great lines.

The Spirit answers to the blood and tells me. Tells me. Tells you.

Tells all God's saved people. Tells me. I am born of God.

That is a great thing. I would put that very, very high up in the list. And the third scene is the one for this morning.

Christian holiness. I want to give you a little quote from Charles Wesley's journal. But I want to ask.

Here we are in the West country. Is there anyone here this morning from Bath? Well, I don't see a hand going up. Now you might be wondering why I'm asking that.

Well, listen to this. It's Charles's journal for July 11 and 12, 1741. I preached first at Bristol, then among the Colliers, a third time in Bath, this is one day, a fourth at Salford, and yet again in the wood.

Let God have the glory. Preaching five times a day, when He calls me to it, no more wearies the flesh than preaching once. It's quite an insight.

Now listen to this. Satan took it ill. Well, he usually does in the preaching of the gospel.

Ah, but wait for the next line. Satan took it ill to be attacked in his headquarters. That's Sodom of our land.

Bath. That's why I asked. Boy, if you're living there, you'd better get out.

Judgment's coming on Sodom. While I was explaining the trembling jailor's question, what must I do to be saved? He raged horribly in his children, people like Bonash. They went out and came back again and mocked and at last roared as if each man's name was legion.

My power increased with the opposition. The sincere were melted into tears and strong desires of salvation. A little cameo from Charles Wesley's itinerant ministry in Bristol and in Bath.

Now, a very short one for the Sunday. July 12th. I preached from Titus 2.11. The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

The power and seal of God is never wanting while I declare the two great truths of the everlasting gospel. Universal redemption and Christian holiness. Right from the beginning, this was a part of the evangel.

Victory over sin. It wasn't something added on later. It was an integral part of the gospel.

In the year of their conversion, 1738, in the April of the next year, field preaching began. But in the March of that year, John and Charles Wesley published the first of 25 collections of hymns. So, within eight months or so of the heartwarming, Charles was already busy.

And that first collection included a hymn entitled Free Grace. There is no one in this congregation who hasn't sung it many, many, many times. Before I tell you what it is, in the week leading up to his conversion, Charles was reading Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians.

Not to be confused with John listening on the Wednesday night to Martin Luther on Romans. Charles was reading Luther on Galatians. And he came to chapter 2, verse 20.

The Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. And at that point in the commentary, Martin Luther says, reader, look at the personal pronouns. Me.

My. Mine. He loved me and gave Himself for me.

And when Charles came to produce what would be possibly his most popular hymn of the 8,500, the words of Luther were ringing in his ear. Free Grace. And surprise, surprise, it's a hymn on the atonement.

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood? Died He for me? Who shed His blood for me? Who Him to death pursued? Amazing God! Luther, how can it be that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me? See, it is one great glorious gospel truth we proclaim Christ died for all. That means He died for you. And you.

And you. And me. But in that same collection was Charles' first hymn on Advent, on Christmas.

And it's the one we're all familiar with. Hark the herald angels. He actually wrote, Hark how all the welkin ring, the old English word for the sky, later changed.

Now, why would we in a hymn or a scene talking about holiness, why quote the hymn on Advent, on Christmas? Because it's in the hymn. Come, desire of nations, come. Fix in us thy humble home.

Rise, the woman's conquering seed. Bruise in us the serpent's head. Genesis 3. And then, Adam's likeness, Lord, efface.

Stamp thy image in its place. Charles Wesley understands that in this great salvation, we lose the likeness to the old Adam. Hallelujah.

And we gain the likeness to the last Adam. Adam's image, efface. Stamp thy image in its place.

Second Adam, from above, reinstate us in thy love. And that is a hymn for Advent, for Christmas, a hymn crying out for God to deal with us and change our hearts. When it comes to prayers for holiness, I think nothing is more moving, more beautiful, more simple, more understandable than a hymn that I have found, a Charles Wesley hymn, that has gone into hymn books in churches that wouldn't normally let John's theology inside the door.

But here is one of his most popular hymns as far as general hymn books are concerned, all for a heart, you know it, to praise my God. A heart from sin set free. A heart that always feels the blood so freely shed for me, the atonement again.

A humble, holy, contrite heart, bleeding true and clean, which neither life nor death can part from Him that dwells within. A heart in every thought renewed and full of love divine, perfect and right and pure and good, a copy, Lord, of Thine. And in the Charles Wesley hymn, you must never omit the great, climactic verse.

For in the last verse, he tells us how this is possible. Thy nature, gracious Lord in part, come quickly from above. Write Thy new name upon my heart.

Thy new, best name of love. And we had it in the great hymn with which our brother opened, based on Ezekiel 36, God of all power and truth and grace, which shall from age to age endure, whose word, when heaven and earth shall pass, remains and stands forever sure that I Thy mercy may proclaim, that all mankind Thy truth may see. Hallowed Thy great and glorious name and perfect holiness in me.

Charles tells us in his hymns that this sanctification, this holiness, brings inner purity. This is also in your book. What is our calling's glorious hope but inward holiness? For this to Jesus I look up.

I calmly wait for this. I wait till He shall touch me clean. New life and power impart.

Give me the faith that casts out sin and purifies the heart. But He also reminds us in the words of the Beatitude, blessed are those who hunger and thirst. Strong language from Jesus.

Hunger and thirst after righteousness, after holiness. My God, I know. I feel Thee mine.

I will not quit my claim till all I have is lost in Thine and all renewed I am. Jesus, Thine all victorious love, shed in my heart as a prayer abroad. Then shall my feet no longer rove rooted and fixed in God.

Oh, that in me the sacred fire might now begin to glow. Burn up the dross of base desire and make the mountains flow. Oh, that it now from heaven might fall and all my sins consume.

Come, Holy Ghost, for Thee I call. Spirit of burning, come. Charles Wesley is hungering and thirsting and calling to God, believing the promises and pleading the Word of God, refining fire.

Go through my heart. Illuminate my soul. Scatter Thy life through every part and sanctify the whole.

Charles also tells us that this great blessing is not something reserved for the millennium or just for heaven. It is for now. This great salvation here on earth, the life so poor that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Come, O my God, the promised seal, this mountain sin removed. Now, now, now in my gasping soul reveal the virtue of Thy love. I want Thy life, Thy purity, Thy righteousness brought in.

I ask, desire and trust in Thee to be redeemed from sin. Now, Savior to Thee, my soul looks up, my present Savior Thou in all the confidence of hope. You know the next line? I claim the blessing now.

And the last verse? Tis done. Tis done. Thou dost this moment save with full salvation bless, redemption through Thy blood I have, and sparkles love and peace.

It brings inner purity. It has to be sought. It can be accomplished now.

It admits of endless growth. I am not going to illustrate that because the fifth and final point is it is the highest grace known to redeem men and women this side of heaven to be filled with all the fullness of God. That great Bible expositor Campbell Morgan said, if St. Paul had written that we might be filled with the fullness of God, we would have been amazed at such a promise.

But, said Campbell Morgan, when Paul wrote that you might be filled with all the fullness of God, then, says Campbell Morgan, we are speechless. We can only bow in the presence of God. Lord, I believe a rest remains to all Thy people known.

A rest where pure enjoyment reigns and Thou art loved alone. A rest where all our soul's desire is fixed on things above where fear and sin and grief expire, cast out by perfect love. I would be Thine, Thou know'st I would, and have Thee all my own.

Thee, all my all sufficient good I want, and Thee alone. Thy name to me, Thy nature grant, this, only this be given. Nothing beside my God I want.

There is nothing in earth or heaven. My last example is based on Hebrews 4. You know, crossing into the promised land the rest of faith, promised to all the people of God. Here is Charles Wesley at his lyrical best, his biblical best, using all the biblical terminology of coming out of Egypt, going through the wilderness, and coming into the promised land of Canaan.

Oh, glorious hope of perfect love! It lifts me up to things above. It bears. Remember Deuteronomy? It bears on eagles' wings.

It gives my ravished soul a taste and makes me for some moments feast with Jesus, priests, and kings. Rejoicing now in earnest hope, I stand and from the mountaintop see all the land below, rivers of milk and honey rise. Remember that? And all the fruits of paradise in endless plenty grow.

Now, Jesus, of course, is the equivalent of Joshua in Hebrew. And so, Charles' last verse, Now, O my Joshua, Jesus, bring me in. Cast out the foes, the inbred sin, the carnal mind, remove.

The purchase of thy death, divide. Give me withal the sanctified, the heritage of love. That is Scripture.

Charles just took the truths of the Bible and put them into memorable verse. May you and I today not just enjoy the good poetry and the lovely lines, but may we seek the great truth of God that lies behind, that with all His receipt, redeemed, blood-bought, ransomed people, every Christian, every believer, whether they have been on the road fifty years or a couple of months, we can all be filled with all the fullness of God. Glory be to Jesus.

I'm going to pray before we close. Thank you, brother. Father, how wonderful to hear truth expressed in such glorious words.

Our hearts rise and everything within us responds to the truth as we've heard it ministered. Thank you, Lord, for the amazing heritage that we have. Thank you so much, Lord, for the truth presented in such a way.

For many it would seem old-fashioned, out of vogue, and yet, Lord, the moment we hear it, everything in us responds and says, yes, I hear the truth. My heart rises to it. We ask You, Lord, that we might know so deeply in our hearts the truth, the understanding of the things that these men of God knew, and that we might become such in our day as can reach our nation.

Lord, we wonder where our land is going to go unless again You raise up men and women who will minister the truth in such a way, who have such a passion for Jesus and for the truth of the Gospel that they cannot be silent. Raise up, Lord, in our day such men. Please do that, Lord, for we need You to come in our day to move like this.

We thank You then for what we've heard. Thank You, Lord, for the truth that our hearts respond to and everything within us rises to. We do now commit ourselves, Lord, to You for the afternoon and for the coming evening meeting, and we bless and honour You and thank You in Jesus' name, Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/20/SID20704.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/herbert-mcgonigle/a-heart-from-sin-set-free/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net