

### First Hymn by C Wesley (*T Richmond Thomas Haweis 1734-1820*)

- 1) O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise,  
the glories of our God and King, the triumphs of his grace!
- 2) Jesus the name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease,  
'tis music in the sinner's ears, 'tis life, and health, and peace.
- 3) He breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free,  
his blood can make the foulest clean, his blood availed for me.
- 4) He speaks, and listening to his voice new life the dead receive,  
the mournful broken hearts rejoice, ye humble poor believe.
- 5) Hear him ye deaf; his praise ye dumb, your loosened tongues employ;  
ye blind behold your Saviour come, and leap ye lame, for joy.
- 6) My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim,  
to spread through all the earth abroad the honours of your name.

### Prayer:

Dear Father, It is our joy to meet together, and we gladly do so in our Saviour's name. We celebrate as millions of Christians have done for 2000 years, the rising of Jesus from the dead on this first day of the week, rejoicing that as He will never die again, so indeed we will not either! So lead us by your Spirit in this time together, and aid us to hear your voice in our songs, and in your word as we worship. In our Saviour's name, Amen.

### Readings

- Isaiah 26:1-10
- 1 Peter 1:3-9

### Intercessions:

Dear Father,

Our country has paused recently to remember the large number of young men pressed into service for our participation in war in Europe. So many died fighting the "enemy" who were not really enemies of Australia. We see in retrospect how unnecessary were these deaths, and the stupidity of war. So we pray today for the peace of the world, not merely a cessation of hostilities, or an uneasy truce, but real peace as Jesus prayed "My peace I give to you, not as the world gives..." We see more clearly, as the Apostle Paul said, "He is our peace, who has made us both one, and broken down the dividing wall of hostility...so making us one" (Eph 2:14-15).

We are grateful for His unifying ministry, by Him who was our sin-bearer who bore our sins and died in our place the very death that should have been ours. Thank you that you now hear our prayers, and receive our worship because we come in His name.

We pray as we often have, for the peace of the world, including for Ukraine and the Middle East, finding it hard to know how to pray as these places have multiple factors we cannot

## He Rides Upon The Storm

---

understand. But you understand all things, and we know you are righteous and good. Bring about your purposes, Father, and institute peace with a correct motive and outcome.

We pray for those who bring your word to the pulpits of our land; grant to them a boldness in proclaiming your truth and uncompromising with your word. Let your own word be heard still in our land, and bring human hearts to reckon with your word, and own your Lordship! Remind all your people what you told Joshua thousands of years ago that you will never leave them not forsake them. And so encourage and bless your people this day and until Jesus returns.

We pray all these prayers in the name of Jesus, the Christ, Amen.

### 2nd hymn by JG Whittier (*T Green Hill A.L.Peace 184-1912*)

- 1) Who fathoms the eternal thought? who talks of scheme and plan?  
The Lord is God! He needeth not the poor device of man.
- 2) Here in the maddening maze of things, and tossed by storm and flood,  
To one fixed ground my Spirit clings, I know that God is good!
- 3) I long for household voices gone, for vanished smiles I long,  
But God has led my dear ones on, and He can do no wrong.
- 4) I know not what the future hath of marvel or surprise,  
Assured alone that life and death His mercy underlines.
- 5) And if my heart and flesh are weak to bear an untried pain,  
The bruised reed He will not break, but strengthen and sustain.
- 6) Enough that blessings undeserved have marked my erring track;  
and where my feet have vainly swerved His chastening turned me back.
- 7) I know not what the future hath of marvel or surprise,  
assured alone that life and death His mercy underlies.

### Message: "He rides upon the storm"

Unfortunate events lead us from time to time to reconsider this subject for a service of worship – an "evergreen". This talk was initiated in 2011 when Cyclone *Yasi*, with a 100 Km front threatened Ingham and neighbouring towns in Queensland with disaster.

Our country has been the site of a number of "extreme weather events" in recent years which some would categorise as 'climate change', others by 'the way it is', some as 'disasters', and to my reading of papers and emails, none as 'judgments of God' except for the occasional radical fundamentalist known for extreme statements. At least one Christian leader has boldly stated that it is "nothing to do with any such idea", that is they repudiated any suggestion of God! An article subsequently in the Advertiser (by a well known atheist journalist) said:

"Church leaders faced with a national disaster are struggling to find relevance and to avoid hypocrisy. In the wake of the floods, people with religious convictions have an age-old question 'Where was God?' in this event!"

Two follow-up letters to the Editor stated:

## He Rides Upon The Storm

---

"...natural disasters are not the result of human choice, so that still leaves the question of why God allows innocent victims of such events to suffer and die. Allegedly God is omnipotent, hence He could prevent these disasters, just as He could prevent the suffering and death of millions of children from starvation and disease.

The real answer is that there is no God. But even if there were, why worship such a malicious and capricious deity?" ("C.J." Mile End)

"With regard to the atheist's column about natural disasters, the Greek Philosopher Epicurus said it well:

'Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is not omnipotent.

Is He able but not willing? Then He is malevolent.

Is He both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil?

Is He neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?' " ("R.L." Blackwood)

Such attacks are now commoner than they used to be, and have become louder and more public, along with the rise of the more aggressive and popular atheism within the media.

One thing is clear about the atheist's article – it is the *Christian God* who is being attacked! There would be no point attacking the god of other belief systems in the same way.

Many of these other gods, according to Epicurus for one, are not interested in human affairs, and were regarded as quite likely to cause tragedy if they felt like it, and may easily be provoked to anger. In another system Allah could not be questioned in that way; his will is inexorable! Such a question to a Muslim would be answered "Allah katib, God has willed it":

By no means can aught befall us save what Allah has destined for us (Surah 9.51)

God misleadeth whom He will, and whom He will He guideth (Surah 14.4)

So there can only be one attitude a Muslim can take to calamity - he or she must submit. *Islam* means "submission". (Note how close this is to fatalism!)

So this question "Where was God?" is aimed squarely at Yahweh or the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, clearly a criticism based on the Christian understanding of God as good, all knowing, and all-powerful; "but this is not good, so make up your mind, you Christians!"

But there is a sting in the tail of the criticism. Many Christians including some leaders hold a skewed, rather soft, view of God, who is expected to be "nice" to us. That is why some people when asked why they no longer believe in God reply "I used to believe in God until..." and then trot out a story of some crisis or "storm" – and their "nice" God blew away! He was actually a *false god*, an idol, (maybe a "Sugar-daddy")! He was a "fair-weather" god, one who took the shape desired by the person. Or maybe he was the result of bad preaching, such as "Come to Jesus and all your troubles will be solved". For that is a false gospel! Just not the truth. In fact some of our problems only *start* when we believe in Him! (The question, "why do bad things happen if God is good?" true non-believers would probably never think of asking!) It is a very old question which occurs more often to believers.

Archbishop Pell asked "Why is it that some atheists get *so angry* at the God they say does not exist?" The anger of those atheists is a bit of a "give-away" isn't it? Are they just rebels, angry at a God they *do* believe in, because He does not do what they want? (This god they refer to is a "straw God", easy to knock down and not much resembling the God we know and worship.

## He Rides Upon The Storm

---

C.S. Lewis in his usual clear way, and before his conversion, put the common view of such critics: "If God were good, He would wish to make his creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks goodness, or power, or both."<sup>1</sup>

Note the huge presumption here, that "making us happy" is a primary function of a "good God". Are we even likely to know what is really good for us anyway?

But it is not just harsh critics who ask such questions. Probably more often it is believers in God who ask why a good God tolerates evil in his world. It is so common that a German Theologian Leibniz wrote a book in 1710 on it; the subject is Theodicy [*theos:god dike:justice*] which he claims is a "*vindication of the justice of God in ordaining or permitting natural and moral evil*". He endeavoured to prove that *the world, as it is, is the best possible world, and that the existence of evil is a necessary condition to bring about the greatest moral good!* (Many others have seen evil as a contradiction of the goodness of God - "it just shouldn't be there", they would say!)

Some Christians have a belief, a view often taught, that God must fix anything deemed to be "wrong", such as any illness. They say you just need "enough faith" and He will heal you. But will He? Should He? (Oh I know He *does*, and He often *has*!) But did He relieve Job in the midst of his suffering; or Jeremiah (the weeping Prophet) from his sorrow; or Paul from his "thorn in the flesh"; or Timothy from his stomach problem? Is it not a simplistic statement, from a rather restricted theological view? It may be associated with two other erroneous views:

- a) If they are prayed for and not healed, they (the sick) may be blamed for "not having enough faith"! (I've heard that!)
- b) It may be part of a belief that all illness is caused by "demons". One has seen the horrific scene of a patient dying of malignancy, and some well-meaning Christian causing a great commotion as they attempt to "cast the demon out"! (I would say they sometimes lacked the gift "discerning of spirits"!)

This seems to me a limitation, a *reduction*, of the sovereignty of God!

So the view put forward of the "either uncaring, or impotent God" is cast in the press or on the airwaves by *angry* human hearts, and the rebuke is designed to stab God for not fitting their belief system, and also stab those who dare believe in Him!

I will try and address this view – with the idea and the event, in the face of that, that brought us Christianity - the Incarnation and its consequence:

- \* The astonishing idea and action of God in sending His Son to the "far country"
- \* ... stripped of His visible glory and to live among rebels
- \* ... confined by space and time, and limitations of human form
- \* ... to be tempted and later taunted by evil powers
- \* ... a stranger and outcast on earth despite what he said and did
- \* ... betrayed by one of his own, *administratively* by the representative of Roman justice, and *corporately* in hatred and envy by the powerbrokers of his nation

---

<sup>1</sup> The Problem of Pain C.S.Lewis p.14 (Fontana 1957)

## He Rides Upon The Storm

---

- \* ... deserted by all his disciples, and denied by one of his closest
- \* ... committed to the gentiles for a level 3 Roman flogging (often fatal)
- \* ... given capital punishment (amongst criminals) by a Roman crucifixion.

And if we could imagine the agony of having crude Roman nails hammered through his Median Nerves, the most complex and sensitive nerves of the human upper limb (designed, if we hear St Paul in 1 Cor. 8:6 and Hebrews 1:2, by Him and His Father), yet all this would appear to pale in comparison with something he suffered which no human mind could begin to imagine, as he bore the totality of human sin, and so at that point in time he experienced being cut off from the conscious presence and fellowship of His Father *for the first time ever* - as he "*tasted death for everyone*" (Heb. 2:9), so that no human being ever need taste it again. (This was the *second* death he tasted - we call it hell as the Apostles' Creed says it!)

For he was the unique Representative of the whole human race, the perfect sacrifice to end all (temporary) animal sacrifices, and thus deal with the sin principle for ever (Heb. 9:13-14, 26-28 10:12-14). It was because He was holy and sinless in his own conscience that he could offer the gift that no-one else could, a vicarious sacrifice acceptable to God on behalf of all humanity – a "full, perfect, sufficient" and permanent sacrifice. And the Holy Father was satisfied for -

- \* His own righteousness and justice was upheld
- \* atonement was made for us to save us
- \* guilt was cleansed, the sin principle destroyed
- \* all who believe it were (are) washed and forgiven
- \* and the way was opened for all humanity for reconciliation and access to God.

But at what cost? Only God knows - God the Father who planned it "from the foundation of the world", and God the Son who gladly accepted the plan and executed it "through the eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14). So *all of the Trinity* participated in this central event of all history.

This was the Suffering God of whom the world knows nothing, as revealed by the angry "throw away" lines with which this message began! This is in part the measure of the love of God! No mere human being has ever suffered like God has suffered!

A final comment about cyclone *Yasi*;

- \* *Yasi* changed course, crossing the coast but not over a major centre as looked likely
- \* It crossed well south of Cairns, minimising the storm surge there as it slowed in the last hours before crossing so the tide was two metres less than predicted
- \* There was not a single death from the storm itself, despite it being the largest and most powerful cyclone ever to cross the coast of Australia in 100 years!

A leading article in the Australian put the absence of loss of life down to a "touch of luck and good planning"! What do you think? Many body bags had been sent to Queensland towns in preparation.

"Where was God?" asked the cynics. Surely right there in the thick of it, His restraining hand saving from death! Many Australians were praying - it including Fay and I; we knew some people, a minister and his family, in the path of the cyclone! He was later to say "Praise our awesome God. Not one life was lost from *Yasi*!"

## He Rides Upon The Storm

---

The Scriptures talk in several places of God moving and demonstrating his power in major events of the elements e.g. Psalm 77:16-19. And the people affected were intended to take it as a great lesson. We should look to hear God speaking in such things, as stated by Isaiah in 26:8-10 "In the path of thy judgments, O Lord, we wait for you". And as in our last hymn:

God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform;  
He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.  
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace;  
Behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face.

Amen

### 3rd hymn by William Cowper (*T "Irish" Hymns and sacred poems 1749*)

- 1) God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.
- 2) Deep in unfathomable minds of never-failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs and works His sovereign will.
- 3) Ye fearful saints fresh courage take, the clouds he so much dread  
are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head.
- 4) Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for his grace;  
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.
- 5) His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour,  
The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower.
- 6) Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan His work in vain,  
God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.

### Benediction:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good, that you may do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever.

Amen.

This service was prepared by Neil McIntosh (M.B.B.S. F.R.A.C.S.) for HopeNet SA