

# The Wicket Gate Magazine

## A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 175 issued September 2025

### Index

1. Martin Luther: Hymnwriter of “a Mighty Fortress” – W. J. Seaton (Nov. 1983)
2. Christ our Mediator. By John Calvin
3. Gleanings in the Psalms. Psalm 105
4. What is Your Hope? A Pertinent from J. C. Ryle
5. A Jar of Jam and God’s Care in Times of Great Need. Mrs Seaton’s Letter
6. The Songs of Degrees: A Help on the Pilgrim’s Journey



At the Web Site of the Wicket Gate magazine [www.wicketgate.co.uk](http://www.wicketgate.co.uk) you will also find the following recordings:

- Through the Bible with the Children – Bible Stories told by Mr Seaton.
- Congregational Praise – the singing of our Church during Worship Services
- Sermons preached by Dr N. Needham, W. J. Seaton and Pastor G. S. Marley
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham
- Podcasts on Various Subjects
- Archive of Audio Sermons.

# ***Martin Luther: Hymnwriter of A Mighty Fortress***

Dear Friends,

No doubt many know Martin Luther for many things, but one thing that is often forgotten concerning the old German reformer is his role of a hymn-writer, and yet, Luther was both able and prolific in this area, and some thirty-seven hymns have been attributed to his pen. What is probably his greatest hymn of all – “A Mighty Fortress is our God,” or as it is also known, “A Safe Stronghold our God is Still.”

In this hymn, we see Martin Luther clad in the armour of God’s everlasting gospel, and striving valiantly against that old enemy of men’s souls, the devil.

“A safe stronghold our God is still,  
A trusty shield and weapon;  
He’ll keep us clear from all the ill,  
That hath us now o’ertaken.  
The ancient prince of hell  
Hath risen with purpose fell; (cruel.)  
Strong mail of craft and power  
He weareth in this hour;  
On earth is not his fellow.”

Martin Luther very much recognised the power and greatness of the evil one in the conflict over men’s souls. To him, the devil was “the ancient prince of hell,” and among all the created beings of God there was none that was “his fellow.” He was in no doubt as to the weapons that this “prince of darkness,”

and “angel of light” could employ, and was employing in that particular “hour” in which he lived. It was “Strong mail of craft and power.” But for all that, the old reformer knew that “in all these things we are more than conquerors because God had granted us an impregnable fortress in which to garrison our souls:- “A Safe Stronghold” – “A Mighty Fortress” in that hour.

Martin Luther’s “Stronghold” is still the only hope of the child of God saved by grace, and it is no wonder that his hymn became known as “The Battle-song of the Reformation.” “The Reformer’s Marseillaise,” as it had been called by one, and “God Almighty’s Grenadier March,” by another. In the hymn there is summed up much of what that great religious revolution was all about, and what it stood for. There was a God in heaven above and in earth beneath; a sovereign God, who justified the ungodly, and then held them in the hollow of His hand to the fulfilment of His perfect will and purpose. Once let a person be assured of that, and not only will *men* fail to “affright” such people, but the very prince of hell himself will make heavy weather in trying to turn them away from the life that they see their God has called them to.

“Come,” Luther would often say to his friends, “let us defy the devil and sing a hymn.” And whether or not we would agree with Rome’s assessment that “Luther has done us more harm with his hymns than with his sermons,” still withal, we can appreciate what drove them to such a remark. They had simply mixed up the process of “cause and effect,” and had failed to see that the devil-defying praise was the product of what God had first wrought in the heart of those who had been justified freely through His grace.

In the opening verse of his hymn, then, Martin Luther is proclaiming his trust in his God. In the second verse, he couples this trust in God with *distrust* in self, and in the third verse, he sings of the absolute all-sufficiency of the One in whom we trust, to the distrust of ourselves.

“With force of arms we nothing can,  
Full soon were we down-ridden;  
But for us fights the Proper Man,  
Whom God Himself hath bidden.  
Ask ye: Who is this same?  
Christ Jesus is His Name,  
The Lord Sabaoth’s Son;  
He, and no other one,  
Shall conquer in the battle.”

And then –

“And were this world all devils o’er,  
And watching to devour us,  
We lay it not to heart so sore,  
Nor can they overpower us.  
And let the prince of ill  
Look grim as e’er he will,  
He harms us not a whit:  
For why? his doom is writ;  
A word shall quickly slay him.”

It has been said that the first line of this verse is a paraphrase of the reformer’s triumphant utterance as he and his fellow-reformers enter the town of Worms, out of which it was feared they would never return alive. But, said Luther, “Though there were as many devils at Worms as tiles on the roof, nevertheless I

will go.” So, his opening lines – “And were this world all devils o’er and watching to devour us.” One old account of the event says that as they entered the town, “the old Cathedral trembled at these notes, and the ravens were startled in their nests in the towers.” It was, undoubtedly, a courageous entry, and in the last two lines of that third verse Luther points us to the source of their strength for such an act. For one thing, let the devil look as “grim as e’er he will,” for all that – “*His doom is writ;*” and secondly, “A word shall quickly slay him.”

Luther had a great dependency on the power of God’s Word, and it is that dependency and power that he writes about in the closing verse.

“God’s Word – for all their craft and force –  
One moment will not linger:  
But, in spite of hell, shall have its course,  
‘Tis written by His finger.  
And though they take our life,  
Goods, honour, children, wife,  
Yet is their profit small:  
These things shall vanish all;  
The city of God remaineth.”

“God’s everlasting Word will stand for ever,” Luther is saying; “The Word of God is not bound.” “Let me live by that, and labour for that; and although men may rob me of my goods, and my honour, my children and my wife, still withal, my eternal lot remains secure in my “Safe Stronghold – The city of God remaineth.”

Our day is vastly different in many ways from the world that Martin Luther knew 500 years ago. Many of the issues have

changed; parts of the Reformation then begun have come down to the people of God in our day to be completed and continued. But whatever, we might pray that God would grant us all something of the same zeal and determination for the work of the Lord in our day. An experimental and heart-felt knowledge of the biblical truths expressed in the old reformer's hymn would go a long way in providing us with that zeal and determination. May God grant it to us all.

Yours sincerely,  
W. J. Seaton. (November 1983)



## ***Christ Our Mediator***

***(by John Calvin)***

One of the most sublime statements in Christian literature outwith the Holy Scriptures of God, is the opening sentence of John Calvin's chapter on the Mediatorship of Christ in his Institutes of the Christian Religion.

“It deeply concerned us,” he says in that place, “that he who was to be our Mediator should be very God and very man.”

Into that statement is poured all the “necessity” that the Sovereign will of God required to reconcile us back to God; and out of that statement is drawn all the remembrance that God undertook to meet that necessity for us in the Second Person of the Godhead – Jesus Christ His Son. As Calvin proceeds

through that chapter, he sets both the Divine necessity and the divine provision clearly before our eyes to enjoy. For example:-

*It deeply concerned us, that He who was to be our Mediator should be very God and very man. ... Our iniquities, like a cloud intervening between Him and us, having utterly alienated us from the kingdom of heaven, none but a person reaching to him, could be the medium of restoring peace.*

But who could thus reach to him? Could any of the sons of Adam? All of them, with their parent, shuddered at the sight of God. Could any of the angels?

The case was certainly desperate, if the Godhead itself did not descend to us, it being impossible for us to ascend.

Thus, it behoved the Son of God to become our Emmanuel, i.e. God with us; and in such a way, that by mutual union *his divinity* and *our nature* might be combined.

*... The work to be performed by the mediator was of no common description:* being to restore us to the divine favour. To make us, instead of sons of men, sons of God; instead of heirs of hell, heirs of a heavenly kingdom.

Who could do this unless the Son of God should also become the Son of man – and so receive what is ours to transfer to us what is his – making that which is his by nature become ours by grace?

... He declined not to take what was peculiar to us, that he might in his turn extend to us what was peculiarly his own ...

Hence that holy brotherhood which he commends with his own lips, when he says, “I ascend to my Father, and to your Father; to my God, and to your God.”

***Another principal part of our reconciliation with God was, that man, who had lost himself by his disobedience, should –***

- (1) Offer obedience, (2) Satisfy the justice of God, (3) Pay the Penalty of Sin.

Therefore, our Lord came forth very man; adopted the person of Adam, and assumed his name, that he might, in his stead – (1) obey the Father, (2) present our flesh as the price of satisfaction to the just judgment of God, and (3) in the same flesh, pay the penalty which we had incurred.

***However***; since as ***God only*** he could not suffer, and as ***man only*** could not overcome death, so he united the human nature with the divine, that he might subject the weakness of the one to death as an expiation of sin – and by the power of the other, maintaining a struggle with death, might gain us the victory.

***... A common nature is the pledge of our union with the Son of God.*** Clothed with our flesh, He warred to death with sin that He might be our triumphant conqueror; and the flesh which He received of us he offered in sacrifice to wipe away our guilt, and appease the just anger of his Father.

Abundantly sufficient for the solid nurture of the children of God is this sober truth, that “When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them who were under the law.”



## *Gleanings in the Psalms*

### *Psalm 105*

We are now among the *long* Psalms, as at other times we have been among the short ones. These varying lengths of the sacred poems should teach us not to lay down any law either of brevity or prolixity in either prayer or praise. Short petitions and single verses of hymns are often the best for public occasions, but there are seasons when a whole night of wrestling or an entire day of psalm singing will be none too long. The Spirit is ever free in His operations, and is not to be confined within the rules of conventional propriety. The wind bloweth as it listeth, and at one time rushes in short and rapid sweep, while at another it continues to refresh the earth hour after hour with its reviving breath.

*Charles Haddon Spurgeon*

This psalm resembles the famous sermon that Stephen preached before the Jewish Council, in Acts chapter 7, and is an historical account of God's mighty deeds and covenant unfoldings among Israel of Old. In verses 1 to 7 there is an exhortation to call upon the name of Jehovah and to show forth His praise. In verses 8-15 we have the early beginnings of the young nation in the covenants of promise. In 16-23 we have the coming of Joseph and the family of Jacob into Egypt, while in 24-38 we have the deliverance from that land, and in 39 to the end of the

psalm, the journeys through the wilderness and into Canaan at last in fulfilment of the promise that God had made.

**Verse 2. “Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him; talk ye of all his wondrous works.”** “Sing” – “talk.” Music and conversation are two things by which the mind of man receives much good, or a great deal of harm. They who make “the Lord” and His “wondrous works” the subjects of both, enjoy something of heaven upon the earth. And they who love the Saviour in reality and truth will always find themselves inclined to “sing unto him,” and “talk of him.”

*George Horne.*

**Verse 2. “... talk ye of all his wondrous works.”** That is – “Talk ye of all his *miracles*.” And who have so many of these to talk of as Christians! Christianity is a tissue of miracles; and every part of the work of grace on the soul is a miracle. Genuine Christian converts might talk of miracles from morning to night; and they *should* talk of them, and recommend to others their miracle-working God and Saviour.

*Adam Clarke*

**Verse 4. “Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face evermore.”** “Evermore” is added in case some might imagine that they have performed their duty, if they have assembled twice or three times a year at the Tabernacle and observed the external rites according to the law.

*Mollerus*

**Verse 6. “O ye seed of Abraham his servant ...”** Consider the relation ye stand in to Him. Ye are “the seed of Abraham his servant;” you are born in His house and thereby entitled to the

privilege, provision and protection of His servants. But you are also bound to the duty of servants: to attend your Master, consult His honour, obey His commands and do what you can to advance His interests.

*Matthew Henry*

**Verse 8. “He hath remembered his covenant ...”** As a long series of years had elapsed between the promise and the performance, the psalmist uses the word “remember” – intimating that the Divine promise does not become obsolete by length of time. Even when the world imagines that those promises are extinguished and wholly forgotten, God retains as distinct a remembrance of them as ever, that He may accomplish them in due season.

*John Calvin*

**Verse 11. “Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance.”** Literally – the *cord* of your inheritance; an expression taken from the ancient method of measuring land with a line of cord. Thus, “the lines” – “the cords” – “are fallen unto me in pleasant places.” As the psalmist explains it there, “I have a goodly heritage.”

*Samuel Chandler*

(to be continued)

# *What is your Hope?*

*A Pertinent Question from J. C. Ryle*

Reader, what is your hope about your soul? Have you any, or have you none? Can you tell in what way you expect to be accounted righteous before God?

Depend upon it, these are very serious questions. You and I are dying men. After death comes the judgment. What is your hope of acquittal in that awful day? What are we going to plead on our behalf before God.

Shall we say that we have done our duty to God? Shall we say that we have done our duty to our neighbour? Shall we bring forward our prayers, our regularity, our morality, our church going, our amendments? Shall we ask to be accepted by God for any of these things?

Which of these things will stand God's eye? Which of them will actually justify you and me? Which of them will carry us clear through judgment, and land us safe in glory?

***Absolutely none!*** Take any commandment of the ten, and let us examine ourselves by it. We have broken it repeatedly. We cannot answer God. Take any of us, and look narrowly into our ways, and we are nothing but sinners. There is but one verdict. We are guilty – all deserve hell, all ought to die. How then can we come before God?

We must come in the Name of Jesus, standing on no other ground, pleading no other plea than this – “Christ died on the cross for the ungodly, and I trust in Him.”

Oh, believe me, Christ must be all the hope of everyone who would be justified and saved. You must be content to go to heaven as a beggar – saved by free Grace – simply as a believer in Jesus – *or you will never be saved at all*. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works lest any man should boast.”



## ***Mrs Seaton's Letter to the Boys and Girls***

Dear Boys and Girls,

How many of you, I wonder, have been enjoying some of the lovely home-made jams that we get especially around this time of the year. The thought of all this jam reminded me of a story I once read about a very special pot of homemade jam and the happiness that it brought to a poor family many years ago.

This family was so poor that sometimes they had no money at all, even for food. But for all that, they had one very great blessing, and that was that they had a mother and father who both believed and trusted in God.

One year, at jam-making time, one of their neighbours brought them two jars of lovely homemade jam. How thankful they were; and at supper time that evening, one of the jars was opened, and the other was put away into a cupboard for some special occasion.

As the weeks of the year moved on, the family's little amount of money began to go down. They didn't have enough to meet all their needs, and they were very distressed. But their faith in God's goodness never left them, and they continued to pray to God, knowing that God knows all things, and that He would help them.

The mother decided to cheer up the children one evening, and so she brought out of the cupboard the other jar of jam that she had put away safely. How the children's eyes lit up with excitement; but first of all, they all bowed their heads and gave thanks to God for what they were about to receive.

As the mother took the lid off the jam, however, what a surprise they got! Lying on top of the piece of paper between the lid and the jam was a shiny half-crown piece. (A half-crown, boys and girls, would only be worth 12½ pence to us today, but in those days when that family lived, it was worth much more, and it could buy many of the things that they needed at that time.)

As they stared and stared at the half-crown they began to understand once again how God knew all their needs all along, and how He had met their need. How He had guided the mother so that she put the jar of jam with the money inside it into her cupboard, and not the other jar. How He had guided her in taking it out again just at the right time when they so badly needed that extra bit of money, to see them through the winter. As they thought about all that, how thankful they were.

Now, boys and girls, we must never forget that we still need God to provide everything for us – even today. Most of us have lots of food and everything else today, but nevertheless, we must

never forget that it is God who gives us all things to enjoy. When we remember that, of course, then we will always thank God for everything that we have. Above all things, we must remember that God has provided salvation for our souls through Jesus Christ His Son. Jesus Christ is the greatest gift of all that God gives to us, and when we have Christ as our Saviour then we are really thankful to God for such a gift to us.

Also, when we know Christ as our Saviour, then we can be sure that God will give us all things that we need. Sometimes we might feel that God doesn't know what we need, but He does know. He knows just as well as He knew what that family needed. When it was the right time, then He gave them what they needed.

One day Martin Luther felt as though God wasn't going to hear his prayers for what he asked, and he felt very sad. He went into the woods for a walk and as he heard the birds singing he imagined they were singing this song:

“Mortal cease from toil and sorrow,  
God provideth for the morrow.”

That cheered him, and he knew again in his heart that God would provide for him and look after him in every way.

With Love,  
Mrs Seaton.

## *The Songs of Degrees*

In Psalm 120 we find the first of a number of 15 psalms that are usually referred to as, “The Songs of Degrees.” They are also known as “The Songs of the Steps,” or very simply, “The Songs of Going Up.”

Some believe that the first and original usage of the psalms was in connection with David “bringing up” again the Ark of the Lord from Kirjath-jearim to Obed-edom after it had been captured in the battle with the Philistines.

Still others see a link between the number of the psalms being fifteen and the fifteen “steps” of the Temple that the priests had to ascend to begin their ministrations before the Lord. The psalms, then, it is held, would have been sung in turn – one on each step – by the ascending priest.

A more general and widespread use of the psalms of degrees would have been the use made of them by the Pilgrims in Israel “going up” to the three great feasts each year in the city of Jerusalem: so, the 122<sup>nd</sup> -

“I joy’d when to the house of God,  
Go up, they said to me.”

It seems very appropriate, and a telling lesson for any of us, that the first of these psalms of degrees should call on the Lord for His help with regard to the matter of the “tongue.” The cry is at least three-fold. No doubt, as the pilgrims set off on their holy exercise of going up to Jerusalem for the feasts, they would have come under a fair measure of rebuke or slander from those who had no time for such things. A person may be “fanatical” about

many things and yet escape the world's censure, but any endeavour to move "up to the house of his God," can produce all kinds of abuse and attack. So, the Lord's help is sought for deliverance from "lying lips."

But then, the sincere pilgrim would realise that he is not only in danger of lying lips "around" him, but a careless tongue within him! Once he joined that happy band of pilgrims bound for Jerusalem, how much he would need a "watchman" to guard the door of his own mouth; and so, his prayer was appropriate in that, as well. And finally, since it was the "praise of God" that he was going up to perform, how much he needed the Lord to "tune his lips" for such a high calling and task.