

'Beulah Land':

Sing Ye Praises with Understanding

For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding. Ps 47:7

I stood beside the bedside of a dying friend in the ICU unit. Her face was marked with earnestness as she shared with me the thoughts that had been passing through her mind. She was a Christian lady, but like many of us, perhaps, church busy-ness and social concerns had somewhat overshadowed her devotional life. Now, only days before she fell asleep in Jesus, something was speaking to her heart in a way she had never before known.

What was the concern of her thoughts? It was the words of our old-time hymns. Hymns that us older folk have sung hundreds, yea thousands of times – but how often have we really 'listened' to the words.

"We sing these songs, but do we really mean it?" she asked earnestly. "Do we mean it when we sing; 'Have Thine own way Lord, Thou art the Potter, I am the clay'?" And she mentioned others such as; 'All to Jesus I Surrender, All to Him I freely give.' 'I will follow Thee my Saviour, Where-so-ere my lot may be', etc. "Do we really think about what we are saying?"

I treasure those last visits with my friend, and I never forgot what she brought to my attention that day. Someday I hope that our voices will blend together in heavenly strains as we sing praises with real understanding.

Having been a great lover of classic hymns from my earliest childhood, (I used to look through the hymnal with more interest than some children do the comics.) I have found in my later years that you can know a lot about the spirituality of a person by the hymns he likes the best, and the ones he does not like.

You can also learn about the spirituality of a church the same way. For those of you that have the privilege of owning the older hymnals, you will find it very interesting to look through and compare what songs are not found in the new hymnal that were in the older ones. Also you can find many songs with verses missing that were there in older song-books.

Some say, "Well, you see, they needed to save space." No, that does not explain it at all! If you look at the new hymnal, you will find a lot of 'white space' that you did not have in the older editions. In fact the old 'Christ in Song', has hymns packed in so tight they are sometimes hard to read.

Now I am not saying that there is never a time when the words of a song might need to be altered slightly from the original to be doctrinally correct. A good example is the first verse of Holy, Holy, Holy. In the old hymnal, it was wisely changed to read, "God over all, Who rules eternity".

Strangely now in the new SDA hymnal, it has been returned to the non-Adventist original; 'God in three persons, Blessed Trinity'. Hmmm, wonder what message we can get from that?

Now today I want to share an interesting change in song that occurred sometime between Christ in Song, and the 'Church Hymnal' of the 1940s. It is a very dramatic change and has a great depth of information to the astute observer. In order to explain the meaning of such a change, I will have to give a lot of background, so bear with me.

I know for a fact from the autobiography of Elder Andreasen, that around the early 1900s, the song was used by our people in its original form. The changing of it is very significant. What is it now? It isn't even included in the new hymnal; I guess that is just as well.

Beulah Land

I want to invite you to read carefully through the hymn as found in the 1940s 'old' Church Hymnal:

554 There Is a Land of Corn and Wine (Beulah Land)

1. There is a land of corn and wine, And all its joys will soon be mine; There shines undimmed one blissful day, For earth's dark night has passed away.
2. My Saviour then will walk with me; O sweet communion that will be! He'll gently lead me by the hand, In that celestial, happy land.
3. A sweet perfume upon the breeze, Will come from ever vernal trees, And flowers that never fading grow, Where streams of life forever flow.
4. The zephyrs then will laden be With sounds of sweetest melody, As angels, with the ransomed throng, join in the sweet redemption song.

Refrain

O Beulah Land! sweet Beulah land! Upon thy heights I long to stand, And view the radiant, jasper sea, And mansions fair, prepared for me, And find on that eternal shore My heaven, my home, forever-more.

I sung it this way for a lot of my life, and it never occurred to me that this was a change, a dramatic change, from what the words were originally meant to convey.

What do these words say to you? They tell about something we hope to have in heaven, something in the future. Certainly not something that anyone could hope to enjoy before Jesus returns, right?

Well, a while back as I pursued some older hymnals and explored the wonderful hymn collections to be found on the Internet, I found the original of this song. I quickly checked the old Christ in Song hymnal and found to my amazement that it was the same in there, and was used this way by our people.

Before I share the words with you I must first tell you where the idea of 'Beulah Land' really comes from, what it is and what it is not.

There is only one text in the whole Bible that gives us this word:

"Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married." Isaiah 62:4

If you read the chapter that contains this verse, you will see that it is about promises to come to God's people IF they obey Him and return to Him and serve Him with all their heart. It is referring to the promise of the Saviour and Messiah. It is NOT referring only to future events in the new earth or heaven, it is what God is promising to those who serve Him now.

In the amazing book of Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan has his pilgrim reach a place called 'Beulah Land'. In this place the Christian can more clearly visualize the glories of eternity. He has closer fellowship with heavenly agencies, the Holy Spirit, the angels, and we understand that the state thus described is not in heaven but in the Christian walk here below.

So what is this 'Beulah Land'? **Friends, it is describing the joy of the fully surrendered, Spirit led life of the truly born-again Christian.** It is not some way off, pie in the sky future hope— it is something you and I can enjoy now, it is the Christian's heritage.

Beulah Land

Now read the ORIGINAL hymn and see what it says to you:

BEULAH LAND

I've reached the land of corn and wine,
And all its riches freely mine;
Here shines undimmed one blissful day,
For all my night has passed away.

Refrain

O Beulah Land, sweet Beulah Land,
As on thy highest mount I stand,
I look away across the sea,
Where mansions are prepared for me,
And view the shining glory shore,
My heaven, my home forever more!

My Savior comes and walks with me,
And sweet communion here have we;
He gently leads me by His hand,
For this is heaven's border land.

Refrain

A sweet perfume upon the breeze,
Is borne from ever eternal trees,
And flowers, that never fading grow
Where streams of life forever flow.

Refrain

The zephyrs seem to float to me,
Sweet sounds to heaven's melody,
As angels with the white robed throng
Join in the sweet redemption song.

Refrain

Heaven's Borderland, friends, is found only in the total surrender of the soul— heart, mind, affections, plans and all that makes up our being. No longer alone, lost in sin, ravaged by uncontrolled moods and passions, swayed to and fro by every circumstance of life; instead all inclination to rebellion has been put away by yielding to the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and we sit at the feet of Jesus in the School of Christ, eager to know His will, happy to do it, rejoicing in the precious truth.

Then it is that we can know what millions have known before us, that personal oneness with the Lord described by the word, 'Beulah', 'Married'. We can know why the martyrs would happily go to stake or dungeon rather than give up the precious experience of being one with Christ.

Now, yes even now, we can come into full possession of the Christian's privilege of communion with the Lord, the blessed guidance of the Holy Spirit and the willing and able assistance of the heavenly angels in the trials and tribulations of life on this dying planet.

Beulah Land

Had our people wandered so far that the joys described in this old hymn no longer made sense to them, and they had to re-word it into the far future? Our pioneers knew this blessed truth; Ellen White spoke of it; see these passages:

"Those who take Christ at His word, and surrender their souls to His keeping, their lives to His ordering, will find peace and quietude. **Nothing of the world can make them sad when Jesus makes them glad by His presence.** In perfect acquiescence there is perfect rest. The Lord says, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee." Isa. 26:3. Our lives may seem a tangle; but as we commit ourselves to the wise Master Worker, He will bring out the pattern of life and character that will be to His own glory. And that character which expresses the glory--character--of Christ will be received into the Paradise of God. A renovated race shall walk with Him in white, for they are worthy.

"As through Jesus we enter into rest, heaven begins here. We respond to His invitation, Come, learn of Me, and in thus coming **we begin the life eternal.** Heaven is a ceaseless approaching to God through Christ. The longer we are in the heaven of bliss, the more and still more of glory will be opened to us; and the more we know of God, the more intense will be our happiness. As we walk with Jesus in this life, we may be filled with His love, satisfied with His presence. **All that human nature can bear, we may receive here.**" {DA 331}

"Why is it so hard to lead a self-denying, humble life? Because professed Christians are not dead to the world. **It is easy living after we are dead.** But many are longing for the leeks and onions of Egypt. They have a disposition to dress and act as much like the world as possible, and yet go to heaven. Such climb up some other way. They do not enter through the strait gate and narrow way. . . ." {MYP 128}

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Romans 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

You see, so many struggle along, falling and failing, when they could be free-- if they would only fully surrender and die to self and let Christ be resurrected in them! Such will never know the joy of Beulah land here, and unless there is a decided change, can they expect to reach the kingdom when they have not even reached the Borderland?

Many of the old-time hymn writers knew this Beulah Land. Here is another old hymn describing its joys.

Dwelling in Beulah land

Far away the noise of strife upon my ear is falling.
Then I know the sins of earth beset on every hand.
Doubt and fear and things of earth in vain to me are calling.
None of these shall move me from Beulah Land.

Refrain

*I'm living on the mountain, underneath a cloudless sky.
I'm drinking at the fountain that never shall run dry.*

Beulah Land

*O yes! I'm feasting on the manna from a bountiful supply,
For I am dwelling in Beulah Land.*

Far below the storm of doubt upon the world is beating.
Sons of men in battle long the enemy withstand.
Safe am I within the castle of God's Word retreating.
Nothing then can reach me - 'tis Beulah Land.
Refrain

Let the stormy breezes blow, their cry cannot alarm me;
I am safely sheltered here, protected by God's hand.
Here the sun is always shining, here there's naught can harm me.
I am safe forever in Beulah Land.
Refrain

Friends, it is a goodly land, why not come over today and dwell there?

"Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married." Isaiah 62:4