

## "CHRIST FOR THE WORLD WE SING"— a hymn study

by Wayne S. Walker

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world...and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5.19).

### INTRODUCTION:

1. " A hymn which points out the need for the word of reconciliation to be proclaimed to the whole world is "Christ For The World We Sing" (#209 in *Hymns for Worship Revised* and #572 in *Sacred Selections for the Church*).
2. The text was written by Samuel Wolcott, who was born at South Windsor, CN, on July 2, 1813. Graduating from Yale College in 1833 and from Andover Theological Seminary in 1837, he became a Congregationalist minister and from 1840 to 1842 worked as a missionary in Syria for a time, but was forced by poor health to return to America. After this, he served as minister for Congregational Churches in Providence, RI; Chicago, IL; and Cleveland, OH. Later, he also served as secretary of the Ohio Home Missionary Society. While remembered for this song, strangely enough he had never tried poetry until he was 56 years old.
3. When Wolcott was living in Cleveland, OH, and serving as minister with the Plymouth Church, the Y. M. C. A. of Ohio held a convention in the city which he attended. Right over the platform, in letters of evergreen, there was a banner emblazoned with the theme of the convention — "Christ for the world and the world for Christ." Having been himself a missionary and seeing the need for such work, he was impressed by these words. The force of the motto appealed to him, and he felt that he ought produce a song to preserve it. Thus, while walking by himself in the street on his way home from the convention on Feb. 6, 1869, the very first night, he responded to his feelings by thinking up these words which he set down on paper later that evening.
4. This was Wolcott's first attempt at poetry, but his hymn has become one of the standard and most popular evangelistic songs of all time. The lyrics were written to fit an existing tune (Italian Hymn, Trinity, or Moscow), composed in 1769 by an Italian immigrant to England, Felice de Giardini (1716-1796). This melody was originally intended for use with the song "Come, Thou Almighty King."
5. "Christ For the World We Sing" seems to have had its first appearance in *Songs of Devotion for Christian Associations*, published in 1870 by Biglow and Main of New York City, NY, and compiled by William Howard Doane. Wolcott went on to be credited with over 200 more songs before his death at Long Meadow, MA, on Feb. 24, 1886, though this is the only one that survives into common usage.

6. Among hymnbooks published by members of the Lord's church during the twentieth century for use in churches of Christ, the song appeared in the 1935 *Christian Hymns* (No. 1), the 1948 *Christian Hymns No. 2*, and the 1966 *Christian Hymns No. 3* all edited by L. O. Sanderson; the 1963 *Abiding Hymns* edited by Robert C. Welch; and the 1963 *Christian Hymnal* edited by J. Nelson Slater. Today it may be found in the 1971 *Songs of the Church*, the 1990 *Songs of the Church 21st C. Ed.*, and the 1994 *Songs of Faith and Praise* all edited by Alton H. Howard; the 1978/1983 *Church Gospel Songs and Hymns* edited by V. E. Howard; the 1986 *Great Songs Revised* edited by Forrest M. McCann; and the 1994 *Praise for the Lord* edited by John P. Wiegand; in addition to *Hymns for Worship* and *Sacred Selections*. Several of these books, along with the 1937 *Great Songs of the Church No. 2* edited by E. L. Jorgenson, have the same tune with "Come, Thou Almighty King." In addition, the 1921 *Great Songs of the Church* (No. 1) also edited by Jorgenson, and *Abiding Hymns* use this tune with "Sound, Sound the Truth Abroad."

7. This hymn challenges us to have a vision for the spiritual needs of the entire world.

### **I. Stanza 1 pictures the world's condition — lost**

"Christ for the world! we sing; The world to Christ we bring  
With loving zeal!

The poor and them that mourn, The faint and overborne,  
Sin-sick and sorrow-worn, Whom Christ doth heal."

- A. It mentions the poor and them that mourn--this world is full of sadness and sorrow, but there is something to alleviate it: Mt. 5.4
- B. It mentions the faint and overborne--the people of this world are weary and heavy-laden, but again God offers a solution: Mt. 11.28-30
- C. It mentions the sinsick and sorrow-worn--the reason for the sadness and heavy burdens is sin; but there is something that can be done: Rom. 3.23, 6.23

### **II. Stanza 2 identifies the remedy for this lost condition — redemption**

"Christ for the world! we sing; The world to Christ we bring,  
With fervent prayer;

The wayward and the lost, By restless passions tossed,  
Redeemed at countless loss From dark despair."

- A. Jesus Christ came to redeem us from our sin: Gal. 4.4-5
- B. This redemption is available through His blood to provide for the forgiveness of our sins: Eph. 1.7
- C. The remission of sins made possible by Christ's redemption is to be preached to all the world: Lk. 24.44-47

### **III. Stanza 3 points out the need--for all Christians to be involved in proclaiming the message**

"Christ for the world! we sing; The world to Christ we bring,  
With one accord,

With us the work to share, With us reproach to dare,  
With us the cross to bear For Christ our Lord."

- A. There is work that we all must share: 1 Cor. 15.58, Gal. 6.7
- B. There is reproach to bear: 1 Tim. 4.10, 1 Pet. 4.14
- C. And there is the cross to bear for Christ our Lord: Matt. 16.24, Gal. 6.5

### **IV. Stanza 4 reveals the results — joy over newborn souls**

"Christ for the world! we sing; The world to Christ we bring, With  
joyful song;

The newborn souls, whose days Reclaimed from error's ways,  
Inspired with hope and praise, To Christ belong."

- A. Even the angels of heaven are filled with joy over just one sinner who is saved: Lk. 15.7
- B. We also need to be happy for those newborn souls, whose days have been reclaimed from error's ways because they have believed on Christ to be saved through Him and have everlasting life: Jn. 3.16-17
- C. When we do, like Paul we should be inspired with hope and praise that these

now belong to Christ and consider them our joy and crown: Phil. 4.1

**CONCLUSION:**

1. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16.15).
2. Someone has said, "Go ye," means "Go me." As Christians, our aim should be, "The world for Christ."
3. To that end, we should continue to preach and live the message of salvation in Christ before a lost and dying world in order that we might truly be able to say, "Christ For The World We Sing."