

The Christ Hymn

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:8)

Scripture: Philippians 2:5–10

Song: “In Christ Alone”

The Wright brothers created the first airplane to achieve flight in 1903. However, what many people fail to realize is that the Wrights were not actually the first human beings in flight. While they invented the first motorized aircraft, another man by the name of Abbas Ibn Firnas was the first to fly. Firnas fashioned a set of wings made out of silk, wood, and feathers in the ninth century. In either case, both parties did something revolutionary and conquered new ground. The ability to fly changed the world forever.

Today’s section of Scripture is known by some as the “Christ Hymn.” While previously the Psalms were the preferred method of singing and rejoicing, the Christ Hymn uses language no psalmist had ever written—the name of Jesus. What Jesus did on the cross would forever change how we live our lives.

In today’s culture, everyone is singing to the tune of something, whether it be anxiety, regret, or depression. However Paul is reminding believers everywhere to sing for joy because Jesus Christ died to set us free. The Christ Hymn is a reminder of what is possible when we completely submit our lives to God.

Father, be my center point and my focus today. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

.....
September 22–28. **Zach Schaar** lives in Canton, Ohio, with his wife and two daughters, and he loves writing for the Lord.

Restored Hope

“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice.” (Isaiah 42:3)

Scripture: Isaiah 42:1–7

Song: “The Spirit of God”

Recently a family member gave me a guitar that wasn’t working properly. No matter what he tried, he couldn’t get it to produce sound when plugged into an amplifier. He didn’t have the time to go through the process of selling it, so he gave it to me as a gift. With a few repairs, it would be as good as new, ready to play once again.

Isaiah, speaking of Jesus’ love for humanity, says He will not break a bruised reed. The Israelites used reed plants to make instruments, specifically flutes. If a reed fell to the ground and became damaged, it was discarded. When it came to using the reeds for the production of musical instruments, the people only sought those without defect. No one in their right mind would ever think of using a bruised or blemished reed to construct a flute.

This isn’t how Jesus views His people. He does not reject those who come to Him broken, rather He repurposes them. He seeks out and saves those who are damaged and defective, those who have been discarded by society and rendered purposeless. He could walk past every “bruised reed” and, like those around Him, see them as too much of a burden to repair—but He doesn’t. The Lord will repurpose and restore people as good as new.

Father, thank You for seeing me as valuable and worthwhile. Use me for Your purpose. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Strengthened in Silence

“You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.” (Acts 2:28)

Scripture: Acts 2:25–31

Song: “In Your Presence”

My vehicle has a malfunctioning radio. While it scans a variety of channels, it's prone to shutting off without warning, leaving me in complete silence. On the surface it may seem like a burden; however, this seemingly mild inconvenience has led me into deep conversations with God.

When life becomes silent, my natural inclination is to worry, to think of foolish things rather than to focus on heavenly truths. The Christian response to silence should be a tuning in to God. In the quietness of our hearts, the Lord will begin to speak as we invite Him in to give direction, wisdom, and encouragement when it's needed most. This is why the writer of Acts makes note of the fact that there is joy in the presence of the Lord.

It takes intentional effort to remove oneself from the surrounding noise. As difficult as it may be, doing so will yield dividends in spiritual growth. When silence is viewed not as a problem but a priority, hearts will be strengthened, and joy will be found in His presence.

Father, lead me into silence and open my ears to hear from You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Provision

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48)

Scripture: Acts 13:44–49

Song: “Give Thanks”

Early on in our marriage, my wife and I loved ministering to people who were homeless. One afternoon as we were about to head home, we drove through a parking lot and encountered a man who caught us by surprise. We quickly stopped and handed him a brown lunch sack of food. In his joy he replied, “God is on time, every time! I was just thinking about what I was going to eat today.”

In Christ there is provision attached to thankfulness. In the book of Acts, Paul was delivering the gospel to an entire city of people. Though many heard what was being spoken, only some of them displayed thankfulness. Because of their thankfulness and openness to receiving the gospel, they were given the Lord’s provision of eternal life. As thankfulness pours from the human heart, provision proceeds from God’s.

Being thankful can easily be placed on the back burner as immediate needs and demands arise. However, thankfulness welcomes God’s provision, and where God provides, there is always enough—enough time, patience, energy, and the resources needed to tackle any obstacle that may pop up along the way.

Father, thank You for always being enough. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Strength for the Journey

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. (Psalm 84:5)

Scripture: Psalm 84

Song: “You Are My Strength”

One afternoon I went to the gym. As I loaded the weighted plates onto each end of the bar, I began to do my first repetition of the chest press. Within seconds, the bar dropped to my chest, leaving me stuck. Noticing that I was unable to remove myself from under the weight, a bystander lifted the barbell with ease and walked away. I was spared not by my strength, but by the man who opted to help me.

Today’s passage is known as a “pilgrimage hymn.” Each year, the Israelites sang this psalm as a way to endure the difficult journey to Zion. Every year, the people of Israel would ascend to the Holy City of Jerusalem. This was by no means an easy journey and would often involve many hardships. However, because their hearts were drawing strength from praising the Lord, they were able to endure the strenuous journey.

The life of a Christian is not lived out of human strength, but godly strength. Many times a person may set out to do something on their own strength and burn out, but those living out of a blessed, divine strength will prosper on the journey of life. Taking the time to recharge in the presence of our Lord is often the most pivotal thing we can do to gain strength for the journey.

Father, help me to endure the circumstances in my life by depending on Your strength and to praise You as I travel through them. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Lead Me

The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away. (Isaiah 50:5)

Scripture: Isaiah 50:4–9

Song: “Open the Eyes of My Heart”

One Christmas morning I remember waking up to an enormous box sitting under the tree with my name on it. “What could this be?” I wondered. “I didn’t ask for anything this big!” As I excitedly tore open the wrapping paper, to my surprise I found a single brick at the bottom of the box. My parents did this as a prank and gave me my “real” presents shortly after.

Isaiah was purposed by God to become a prophet to Israel. His gift was to speak as the Lord was speaking through him. James 1:17 tells us that God only gives good gifts. Even though Isaiah’s gift to become a prophet didn’t always wield the best earthy result (as he was persecuted and beaten), he obediently walked in his gifting from the Lord. When Isaiah opened up his ear and became attentive to God, he received a good gift—that of knowing God’s will for his life.

God still speaks to His people today. There is so much He wants to pour into the hearts of those with faith. Unlike my brick of a Christmas present, God will never deliver a bad gift. God has a purpose and a gifting for all His people, and we receive it by being attentive to what He has to say.

Father, I pray today that You would show me Your ways as I listen for You to speak into my life. Lead me according to Your plan. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Dry Places

[Jesus] grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. (Isaiah 53:2)

Scripture: Isaiah 53:1–7

Song: “Desert Song”

The Atacama Desert in Northern Chile is officially known as the driest place on earth. Most of the rainfall in the area is caught by the Chilean Coast Range and the Andes Mountains. In between the landmarks is a desert land so arid that the ground cracks and crumbles. However, every five to seven years something miraculous occurs. Downpours of rainfall soak dormant seeds of wildflowers, and suddenly the once dry and vacant desert land turns into a sea of beautiful and majestic wildflowers.

Jesus, the “suffering servant,” walked the earth with a mission in mind: to bring joy and salvation to the lost and the broken. Today’s verse says He grew “like a root out of dry ground.” The nourishment and strength given to Jesus was nothing short of a miracle and a true provision of God. To grow and produce anything out of dryness is nearly impossible, but God always makes a way for growth.

In the desert, God is still working. When all hope seems lost, when opportunities are falling apart, and when the proverbial fuel tank of our emotions is running on fumes, God is still working and producing beauty from the dry places.

Father, grow my life through my obedience to You. Help me to be patient and lean not on my understanding but Yours. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.