

Ivory Palaces

By Maggie Moller

“All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad.”

(Psalm 45:8 NIV)

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

(Proverbs 3:5-6)

This hymn holds a special place in my heart. I heard this hymn off and on during my early childhood, but it didn't strike me as a beautiful image of the Lord's glory until my Great-Grandma's funeral. My Great-Grandma and I had a special relationship. Being named after her, I have always held a sort of subtle pride in my parents' desire for me to be like her. She was one of the Godliest women I have ever met, and I have the honor of being her namesake. When she died, I was filled with strange emotions. She was the first person in my life to die with whom I had a strong relationship. I was filled with a sudden sense of the loss of never having the chance to see her on this earth again but at the same time joy that she was finally in the presence of our Lord and Savior.

Christmas brings back memories of Great-Grandma in many ways. Fun traditions such as her ginger cookies always bring back happy memories. Sadly, she also passed away a few weeks before Christmas. And while this can put a sad note on the Christmas season, it also is a time of rejoicing because of the knowledge we have that she is celebrating Jesus' birth with Him in heaven! “Ivory Palaces” always reminds me of Great-Grandma and the Godly example she left for me to follow. But not only does it remind me of Great-Grandma, it also fills me with wonder at the unimaginable, unattainable glory of our God!

I have chosen this hymn because I believe it fully captures this month's theme of “Idolatry,” as well as giving the Christmas message. After reading the refrain, we can clearly see the Christmas connection. However, you may be wondering how I can see this hymn fitting within the theme of “Idolatry.” After reading the lyrics of “Ivory Palaces,” I was left feeling a deep sense of awe and wonder at the beauty and splendor of the God we serve. And yet despite His glorious majesty and power, we often trade all He provides to us for the cheap, counterfeit junk of the world. I am as guilty of this as anyone.

In our culture, it can be easy to assume we are no longer tempted by idols. Since we don't encounter golden idols set up in shrines on a regular basis, this must have been a stumbling block for the ancients alone, right? I thought this myself until I was in high school when all of a sudden God opened my eyes to see all the idols I had set up in my own life. I was shocked to discover that while I wasn't physically bowing down to a graven image, I had areas of my life that I was in a sense “worshipping.” For my entire life I have been a planner. I plan what I am going to do each day, each week, each month, and on and on. However, when I was in high school, God quietly challenged me to examine my motives behind my intense organization. And what I discovered wasn't exactly pretty or worth bragging about. I found myself so focused on my goals and my life plans, I had left little room for the plans God had for my life.

As I look back over the last seven years, I cannot help but rejoice and give God the glory for the changes He has brought in my heart. I do not pretend to say it has been a rosy path or that I

have arrived at a point of completion. Rather, far from it! However, God has brought me far, and I can attest to the wonderful feeling of beginning the process of letting go and fully trusting in His wonderful plans!

I do not pretend to say I never struggle with this in my life or that I am a more developed Christian than everybody else. Rather, it is only through a conscious effort and strength from the Lord that I am able to even begin to conquer myself. My roommate and I recently had a discussion about whether or not a person ever “gets over” their struggles or if it is a lifelong battle. I think it is safe to say we will never reach a state of perfection in our walk with the Lord until we are one day seated at His feet. This life is a battle, a race, a struggle. I encourage you to ask the Lord to show you areas in your own life where you may be holding on too tightly. Areas where “idols” have popped up quietly but now have a stronghold. It is not an easy revelation to see at first, but the joys that follow are beyond description!

Henry Barraclough The Lyricist and Composer

Henry Barraclough was born on December 14, 1891, in Yorkshire, England. From the early age of five, he showed an interest in music and began training for the piano and organ. When he entered the workforce, he followed a business career path and his musical talents were kept as a personal interest. His first job was with the Car and General Insurance Company as a claims adjuster. Then from 1911 to 1913 he served as the assistant to Parliament member George Scott Robertson.

Wanting to pursue his music in a more prominent way, he joined evangelist Wilbur J. Chapman as his team pianist. With Mr. Chapman, Barraclough moved to the United States to pursue evangelist work in America. After his arrival in the United States, World War I broke out, and Henry enlisted to serve under his new country. After the war, he returned to serve with Mr. Chapman once again. It was during this time the hymn “Ivory Palaces” took shape.

Unlike most of the hymns we have previously studied, the history behind “Ivory Palaces” has been recorded in detail. During the summer of 1915, when Henry was only 24 years old, Wilbur Chapman led an evangelical tour around North Carolina. It was during an evening service at a stop in Asheville that the Lord laid the words and music for this hymn on Henry’s heart. That evening, Mr. Chapman preached on the splendor of the Lord as described by the Psalmist in Psalm 45. Verse 8 especially struck Henry, and when he returned to the hotel after the service, he set right to work pouring out his heart into his song. The next morning Mr. Chapman opened his service with “Ivory Palaces.”

As one critic described, “Ivory Palaces” does not demonstrate the highest level of poetic or musical development; however, the power of its message far outweighs its technical flaws. Sadly, “Ivory Palaces” is not included in our hymnal. I have included the verses below so you can read for yourself the beautiful message penned in each stanza. According to one source, the verses can be analyzed according to the progression of Christ’s life. The first verse describes his heavenly glory. This verse, along with the refrain, speaks the Christmas message most powerfully to my heart. I think we all too often forget the majestic glory Christ left when He came to earth in the bodily form of a tiny baby. The second verse speaks the message of His death on the cross to cover our sins. The third verse describes the healing and redemption we can find in accepting His free gift of salvation. Lastly, the fourth verse gives us the hope of His return and our eternal life with Him in glory.

For the larger portion of his life from 1919 to 1961, Mr. Barraclough served as an administrator for the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. He passed away at the age of 92 in Philadelphia. During his lifetime he penned lyrics for 20 hymns and composed music for 120. More importantly though than his life accomplishments were his faithful service to his Lord and his adoration for Christ's heavenly glory!

Ivory Palaces

My Lord has garments so wondrous fine,
And myrrh their texture fills;
Its fragrance reached to this heart of mine
With joy my being thrills.

Refrain:
Out of the ivory palaces
Into a world of woe,
Only His great eternal love
Made my Savior go.

His life had also its sorrows sore,
For aloe had a part;
And when I think of the cross He bore,
My eyes with teardrops start.

Refrain
His garments too were in cassia dipped,
With healing in a touch;
Each time my feet in some sin have slipped,
He took me from its clutch.

Refrain
In garments glorious He will come,
To open wide the door;
And I shall enter my heav'nly home,
To dwell forevermore.

Works Consulted

Cyber Hymnal: "Ivory Palaces" <http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/i/v/o/ivorypal.htm>

Cyber Hymnal: "Henry Barraclough"

http://www.hymntime.com/tch/bio/b/a/r/r/barraclough_h.htm

"Ivory Palaces" <http://www.gbod.org/resources/ivory-palaces>