

I Know Whom I Have Believed

By Maggie Moller

“That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”

(2 Timothy 1:12)

The Lyricist – Major Daniel Webster Whittle

Daniel Webster Whittle was born on November 22, 1840, in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts. His mother was a Godly woman who instilled in him a strong sense of Christian principles. When he was a teenager, Daniel got a job working as a cashier for a Wells Fargo bank. One night, while he was working as a night watchman at the bank, he surrendered his life to the Lord. After his conversion, he became a Sunday School superintendent at the great Tabernacle in Chicago. It was there that he met his wife, Abbie Hanson.

In 1861, he joined the army and was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant. During the summer of 1862, as the Civil War intensified, Daniel was called to active duty in the South. On August 22, 1862, the night before his departure, he and Abbie were married. It would be a year before he and Abbie would be reunited. Before he left, his mother placed a New Testament in the haversack she packed for him. This little New Testament would play an important role in strengthening his dedication to the Lord.

Daniel rose to the rank of Major through his service during the Civil War. While he was leading a charge, he was wounded in his sword arm and placed in a prisoner of war camp. Due to the severity of his injury, his arm was amputated. During his stay in the POW camp, Daniel, wanting something to ward off his boredom, found the New Testament his mother packed for him. He read through it once, and when he was finished, he started over again.

One night, the nurse on duty came and woke Daniel up. The nurse informed Daniel that a prisoner was dying and had requested someone to pray with him. When Daniel was confused as to why the nurse would consider him a religious man, the nurse replied that he had seen Daniel reading his Bible faithfully and thought he must be a Christian. Daniel confessed to the nurse that his life had not reflected Christ faithfully and that he was not qualified to help comfort the dying soldier. Desperate, the nurse begged Daniel to at least accompany him back to the dying man's bedside. Filled with compassion, Daniel agreed. What transpired that night with the dying soldier is best recorded using Daniel's own words. He said of his experience that night,

“I dropped to my knees and held the boy's hand in mine. In a few broken words I confessed my own sins and asked Christ to forgive me. I believed right there that He did forgive me. I then prayed earnestly for the boy. He became quiet and pressed my hand as I prayed and pleaded God's promises. When I arose from my knees, he was dead. A look of peace had come over his troubled face, and I cannot but believe that God who used him to bring me to the Savior, used me to lead him to trust Christ's precious blood and find pardon. I hope to meet him in heaven.”

After the war, Daniel returned home and got a job as treasurer of the Elgin Watch Company in Chicago. Ten years later, at the prompting and encouragement of his close friend, D.L. Moody, Daniel entered into evangelism ministries and hymn writing.

Most of his early works were set to music by Philip Bliss. (Mr. Bliss is also known for composing the music to “It Is Well With My Soul” - his story can be read in the September newsletter.) “I Know Whom I Have Believed” was set to music by James McGranahan, who composed music for many of Daniel’s later hymns.

Daniel’s daughter, Mary, also composed music for some of her father’s hymns. Mary married William Moody, the son of her father’s close friend, D.L. Moody. Daniel died on March 4, 1901, in Northfield, Massachusetts, at the age of 61.

The Composer – James McGranahan

James McGranahan was born on July 4, 1840, in Pennsylvania. Born with a strong tenor voice, James pursued a career in musical performance. He studied under many gifted teachers who all assured him he had a talent that would make him famous without a doubt. Young James was intrigued with thoughts of a life of fame and fortune, and eagerly started down the path of training as an opera performer.

Although James was a Christian, he was not willing to surrender his entire life to his Lord. James had a close friend, Philip Bliss, who was also involved in the musical field. Unlike James, however, Philip was concerned not with using his talents for worldly fame but rather for bringing lost souls to Christ. Philip was concerned with his friend’s motives and decided to write James a letter asking him to question the reasons behind his dedicated music studies. Unsure if what he was doing was right or not, Philip read his letter to his close friend, Major Daniel Whittle. Supported by Daniel’s encouragement, the letter was sent to James. When James received the letter, the words of his friend hit him as nothing else had in his life. It opened his eyes to his motives for his dedicated efforts at his studies. Philip’s words were before him day and night.

Sadly, James never got to tell his friend how much his letter impacted his life. One week after James received the letter, Philip and his wife were killed in a tragic train accident. As soon as James heard the news of his friend’s death, he rushed to the scene of the accident. It was there that James met a man who would become a dear friend: Daniel Whittle. Daniel said later of this meeting that as James stood before him, he knew whom Philip would want to be his successor in composing music for his (Daniel’s) hymns.

As the two men rode back to Chicago, Daniel encouraged James to turn his talents over to service for Christ. Philip’s letter planted the seeds of surrender in James’ heart and Daniel’s words watered them. The opera lost a promising star on that train ride back to Chicago, but the army of the Lord gained a valuable soldier. James completely dedicated his talents and his life to the service of Christ. He worked diligently in evangelical campaigns all throughout America, England, and Ireland. James composed over 25 hymns during his lifetime, including “I Know Whom I Have Believed.” James passed away on July 9, 1907, in Kinsman, Ohio, at the age of 67.

The main theme of this hymn is the assurance we have as believers in Christ’s Salvation. Daniel and James knew that Salvation does not come from man’s efforts but from Christ’s death and resurrection. How sweet it is to know we can trust fully in Christ’s work for us and not on our own efforts!

If we had to earn our Salvation on our own merit, we would all fail as soon as we enter the world, but because Christ died to pay the price for our sins, we can go boldly before the throne of God as redeemed and born again into God’s family! We too can KNOW in whom we have believed, just as Daniel and James did so long ago.