

The Fear of the Lord

By Paris Reidhead*

I was at a Bible Conference down in the Alliance Church in Atlanta, Georgia and in the service that day was a woman, who I had not met before. She was obviously a very wonderful person. I could tell by looking at her or just seeing her. At the doorway she gave me her name. She was Mrs. Harriett Williams. Her husband and she founded the St. Paul Bible College the Alliance school out in the west coast as well. She had been a great blessing to so many.

She said, "Brother Reidhead, will you make a promise to me?" Oh by the way, she asked me to come to her home for tea that afternoon. I did and went out where she was staying and she said, "I want you to make a promise to me. I want you to promise wherever you go you will tell God's dear children two words for me." She said, "I found so many in these last years of my life, who have all of the words, all of the terms, even the Scripture verses doctrines but somehow they have made the mistake of thinking that because their minds perceive them because they can write them down or have them written that that is all that God is concerned about. Tell them there are two words they must regard and must obey." I said, "Why Aunt Harriett, I will do what I can. What are the words?" She said, "The first word is 'meditation'. Once truth is presented to our minds, we have to meditate on it." To meditate means to ruminate or to digest, tear it apart, to break it down and find how this truth fits in with that which we have experienced which is already real to us. Meditation. Not just memory, not just writing, not just repeating, but meditation on the truth. And then she said, "Tell them that the second word I want them to remember is 'revelation'. It is not enough to have it in your mind it's not yours until God the Holy Spirit reveals it inwardly and makes it experientially your own."

Well, I mentioned to you the other day how that I had gone to Africa as a missionary. Having got an 'A' in the Christian Life course taught by Maude Groom. The problem was that I thought all that was required was that I should get a grasp on its sufficiently that I could pass the test. If I did that, then obviously I had the truth. But the mistake I made was this, I had not meditated upon it nor had it been inwardly revealed to my heart.

Now, the text we have been using throughout this conference has been Hebrews the second chapter and the third verse, which declares, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation." Well, we neglect it when having given intellectual ascent and agreement with it. We fail to meditate on it until it is inwardly revealed and made experientially our own. So there is a danger here and I believe that it is not quite fair to the Lord to take a text that has a warning in it and not to enforce that warning from the Scripture. And so I ask you to turn to Proverbs 8 verse 13. I wanted you to notice there the Spirit of God has given to us a statement regarding the fear of the Lord.

We ought to recognize is when He says, "How shall we escape if we neglect..." Whatever it means, it's serious. I want you tonight to think with me about what the Word of God says regarding the fear of the Lord. Here in Proverbs 8:13 we read, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate," writes the writer of Proverbs. "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil."

Now the Word declares, "the angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear Him" (Psa. 34:7). In other words, He is our high tower, our shield, our buckler, our wall of defense against the enemy. We've got to find out, therefore, what it is to fear the Lord. Here He tells us it's to hate evil. Anything in our hearts, our lives, our minds, our motives, our past, our present or our plans for the future that grieves God we've got to hate.

In Proverbs 9 in verse 10 we read, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." You don't start to get smart until you become afraid of God. That's what it says. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Now we've been so supersaturated with the testimony concerning God's love that we have almost thought that anyone who speaks of the fear of the Lord is indicting His character.

Years ago I was at Camp Pinnacle up near Albany, NY and the Spirit of God led me to speak on this theme, not this message, but from this theme. When I finished, I went into the lodge and there an open door into a room where the young people who were at the camp were being talk to by the leader of the young people.

This is what he said: "Now, I want you young folks to forget everything that preacher said about fearing God. You don't have to be afraid of God. There's no reason in the world, oh I know, but that's all Old Testament, and it's not for you. Therefore, you got to know that God loves you and He's..."

I was sick, sick at heart. Not because he had seen fit to take exception to what I had said, but because of the misleading he was doing of these young people. Because it really is true that we should fear the Lord. "It's the beginning of wisdom;" "it's to hate evil."

Now, I want you to listen to some of the texts that we have in the Word that commands us to fear Him. I think it is extremely important that we should hear these.

In Deuteronomy the 10th chapter and the 12th verse, "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul."

So the fear of the Lord is associated with walking in His ways, loving Him and serving Him.

In Joshua chapter 24 and verse 14, "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord."

In Ecclesiastes 12th chapter and the 13th verse, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

Isaiah chapter 8, the 13th verse, "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread."

Someone might say, but that's all Old Testament. What about the New Testament?

In Matthew chapter 10, verse 28 Our Lord Jesus said, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

I Peter chapter 1 and verse 17, "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." And I Peter chapter 2 and verse 17, "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the King."

Now, I think that this is sufficient to establish for us that the fear of the Lord is that which is to be there. He is to be loved; He is to be served; but He is also to be feared.

In Romans the 3rd chapter you get a picture of people who do not fear Him. I think it would pay you to turn there for a brief moment. Let's look at this and find out what kind of people they are who do not fear God. I think if we do we'll be a little astonished and we won't want to be included in that number. Romans the 3rd chapter will tell us what we want to hear and in the 9th verse we read, "What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known:" Why? "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:9-18).

I do not want to take my place in that company. Therefore, I am going to ask the Spirit of God to show me what it means to fear the Lord and I'm going to do it, because I believe He is not only to be loved but He is to be revered. He is God and He reigns and He rules, and when He gives a commandment, He expects it to be obeyed, and if it isn't obeyed, the punishment will be poured out. That we will see.

Now I would like to have you see some of the promises in God's Word concerning this matter of reverencing or fearing God.

In I Samuel chapter 12 and verse 14, "If ye will fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God."

In Psalm 25 and verse 12, "What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall he (that is the Lord) teach in the way that he shall choose."

Psalm 31:19 "Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!" Great goodness laid up for those who fear Me.

Isaiah chapter 50 and verse 10, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

In Luke chapter 1 and verse 15, "And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation."

And when the angel spoke to Cornelius, he said, "That in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him" (Act. 10:35). "To fear the Lord."

I believe that in the last months in America we have been seeing the beginnings of siftings and the beginning of judgment in the house of God. I believe that it comes because of the fact there has been such a great loss of the fear of the Lord on the part of those who name His Name and profess to serve Him. If we need a revival in our land, and we certainly do, it ought to be a revival of a heart-felt fear of God. I believe that unless there is genuine repentance and change there is going to be such evidence of God's attitude, God's judgment that there will be those who do fear Him.

Why should we wait until He has to arise and deal with us. Let us now on our own, because we are wise and because we want blessing, and we want to be blessable, "Let us fear the Lord." I think it is important for us, then, to find out from the Scripture itself what are the results of fearing God. We have looked at the commandments to fear Him, and the promises to those who fear Him, and the kind of people who don't fear him. Now let's look in the Scripture at the results of fearing God.

I want you to go back to Acts chapter 2, verses 41 to 43, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles."

Do you see the result in "continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and in fellowship and in worship and in prayer"? "The fear of the Lord" that was the result of being exercised together in meditating upon the Word, experiencing the Word, following the Lord in that kind of fellowship one with another, and in worship, breaking of bread and in prayer. Fear came upon them. But I want you to notice this. "Many signs and wonders were done by the hands of the apostles." We want to see the Lord Jesus glorified. We want to see miracles that are going to demonstrate that He is today the same as He was yesterday. It makes my heart so sick when I see people in their eagerness to have the Lord set forth as healer having to feign healing by so many little subterfuges. I believe that what we need to see is the Lord magnified and glorified in our midst by signs and wonders that are done to His glory and His honor and praise, but I notice that it is in relation to their fearing the Lord.

Oh we see that in Acts the second chapter. I want you to turn over to the 5th chapter and verses 11-16. Here again we're going to find that the Spirit of God is working you know the story Ananias and Sapphira have agreed, have decided to sell one of their properties or their house and to not give the entire amount to the church for the needs of the people, but to give only a part of it and tell Peter that they sold it for the amount they gave because they want the credit with the believers of having sold their house and giving it all to the work of the Lord. And they agreed to keep back part of the price and in the 5th verse Peter tells him what he has done, the Spirit of God revealed it by the Word of knowledge and "Ananias hearing these words from Peter fell down and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him" (Act. 5:5-6). Then in verse 11 Sapphira has come in, Peter asked her and she says exactly what she'd agreed with Ananias to say and so in verse 11 we find or in verse 9, "Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things" (Act 5:9-11). But now notice, "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people" (Act 5:12). And in verse 14, "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:14).

Do we want to see multitudes added to the body of Christ? Do we want to see that revelation of the power of Christ? Then it would seem that here in this matter of coming to the place that the fear of the Lord is upon our hearts we are prepared for

Him to reveal Himself in that power. This is not something then to feel lightly about nor to neglect, because apparently there is here in this Word at least in this Book a relationship between fearing the Lord and the blessing of God upon the ministry.

Turn over please to Acts, the 10th chapter. You know this as the chapter having to do with Cornelius. Here in this 10th chapter, "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway" (Act. 10:12).

He feared the Lord and prayed and God heard his prayer, and God sent an angel to him to instruct him that he was to send for Peter to come, and told him where Peter was, so he could send his messenger to him.

Then we recognize that it was said that wherever there are those who fear God, God answers prayer. We should not neglect this nor forget it.

Turn if you please to Acts chapter 9 just back a bit to verses 26 to 31. Saul had come down to Jerusalem. The disciples were afraid to receive him into their number, they thought he was still a fifth columnist for the Pharisees, "But Barnabas took him, (in verse 27) and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" (Act. 9:27-31).

Now this is the fourth time that statement has been associated with blessing from God.

There are tremendous things that men can do without God. A believer from overseas went through America and visited a great many churches. When he got back, he was asked by some of his friends what was the main impression that he had of Christianity in America. And he said, "Oh, it is just astonishing and wonderful how many things the American Christians can do without God."

Well, we have great monuments to man's ability and talent and skill that we have been able to accomplish, because we know the secrets of how to do it. I'm so tired of seeing the kinds of things that men can do if God were dead. I want to see something done before I finish this pilgrimage that only God can get the credit for. That's so totally of Him that no man would dare touch it. I believe that God wants to do it, but I believe it's going to begin when there rises in our hearts that wholesome fear of the Lord, to the place that we hate evil and deal with anything and everything in our lives that grieves Him whose name is holy.

Acts 19, Acts the 19th chapter if you please. There are several Scripture verses that I want you to see in this connection. I begin with verse 13, you know where it was Paul is in Ephesus and was ministering and we read, "Certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (Act. 19:13-20).

Five times in the Book of Acts, *mighty signs and wonders, multiplying of the believers, prevailing of the Word of God were associated with the fear of the Lord*. It seems to me, therefore, that this is sufficient for us at this time, in the light of the potential judgment of God, the beginnings of which we have seen, that we should ask ourselves how much of the truth we hold, have we experienced. There is something dangerous about truth. If you have truth in your mind long enough, and it doesn't get down to your heart soon enough, you are going to become casual and careless and cynical about the truth. Only when that truth becomes vitally and dynamically and experientially real in your heart and life are you fit to minister it or to teach it or to witness to it. If you are witnessing out of the storehouse of a clever memory, you are nothing more than a tape

recorder that plays according to demand. Has the truth become real; does it have free course, is it glorified? If it isn't, we have been handling the Word of God amiss.

I believe that it is imperative to us that the truth we profess, the truth we proclaim, the "so great salvation" that we embrace should become experientially ours, and if we find a place that it isn't, that's the place that we ought to stop until it is. We ought to have this truth that is so alive and so vital, so dynamic. Oh, what a tragedy it is when preachers or teachers or missionaries become professional in the handling of the glorious things of God. What a tragedy it is! And how easy it is for the people to see it.

Years ago when I had missionaries I was trying to train in deputation work for the Sudan Interior Mission, I knew that they had the greatest material in the world and they were doing the poorest job with it. They didn't know how to use it, how to handle it. I remember once I was driving along and I just turned the radio on. It happened to be Arthur Godfrey in his morning broadcast. My missionary friend sitting there (who would put a congregation to sleep in the first five minutes) and he had a great ministry, but he just simply...he was Sominex if I ever heard him. And I noticed he was listening to Arthur Godfrey and he was laughing and he was empathizing with what he was hearing.

"Do you like that stuff?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"Well, why?"

"I don't know."

I said, "Tell me. What is it that happens when you listen to him?"

He said, "I guess it's because he seems to mean what he says, and experiencing it when he says it."

I said, "If you learn that I'm going to let you speak again one of these times. I'm going to let you speak again, you just learned that."

But you see he had an idea that as a missionary he was going before a homiletics class and he had to have a little sermon, and he had to write it down, and he had to have notes, and he had to give the notes. And he's just put anybody to sleep. It wouldn't work.

I turned over to another station and there was somebody else and he had and you could tell what he had. He had a piece of yellow fool's cap up there on a little stand and he was reading off of that into the radio. He'd put you to sleep too.

One man got a half a million dollars a year because he talked as though he meant what he said. The other fellow was getting \$50.00 a week, because he just learned how to read somewhere. And it was going into through his eyes out through his lips and it never went through his brain or his heart. So the consequence was that one was nothing and the other a national celebrity...Godfrey never said a boring thing all the years he was on the radio, because everything he said, He was experiencing when he said it.

Now I believe that the Spirit of God wants us to experience the truth we are sharing. If we don't experience it, have the courage not to talk about it. If it is not yours; if you haven't experienced it, and you want to share it, then have the honesty to say, "Look, I understand this with my mind, but I have never experienced it in my heart." Have enough fear of God to believe that if we are going to handle the Word of God deceitfully, as though we had experienced it when we haven't, that God is going to judge us. Now, that's where the fear of the Lord begins, with the truth that we hold. Is it ours? Have we experienced it? Is it real? Is it vital? Is it dynamic? Or is it just words. I'll tell students in your classes are going to know the difference. Parishioners listening to you and the people in the outer reaches of the earth are going to know the difference. It is the fear of the Lord in our hearts that makes us afraid to be dishonest with the Word of God. If we haven't experienced it we have the courage and the honesty to say, "I haven't, but I want to. I'm a candidate for it. Join me in the search."

Then when you've experienced it and it's real, then you share it as yours, but don't just become a peddler of truth, a merchant of doctrine. It's got to be real. The fear of the Lord should teach us NOT to handle the Word of God dishonestly, but to live it, to experience it, to have it ours, vitally, dynamically real in our hearts and in our lives. That's what I am pleading for tonight.

Now, it's a choice. It's a choice you have to make. Everything in the Christian life is a choice. You choose whether you are going to be satisfied with an intellectual apprehension or perception of the truth, or a heart experience of the truth. You make that choice. Nobody makes it for you. It's a choice you make, whether you're going to present something as though you have experienced it, even though you know in your heart you haven't experienced it. It's a choice you make. And we've got to understand that we are responsible for our choices. And the person who chooses to go into sin has got to understand that God is going to chasten and God is going to judge.

But there are sins other than the ones that the world condemns. There are sins in the spirit. I want you to turn to Hebrews, chapter 12. I believe this 12th chapter of Hebrews may help us bring this into focus and to see what the Spirit of God is trying to say to us tonight. In Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 5, "And ye have forgotten the exhortation; which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:5-11).

"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of the sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:22-29).

Has anything I've said this evening in any way mitigated against the fact that the God of the Bible is a God of love, that He loves us, that He loved us enough to send His Son to die for us; and His Son loved us enough to shed His blood for us? Has anything been said that will rob that of its significance and importance, because I've dared to say that our God is a consuming fire, that our God hates sin, and that the fear of the Lord is to hate evil? Is there any conflict between those two? No, I think not, not at all. The more you love God, the more you want to please Him.

What is love? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and mind, and soul, and strength" (Luk. 10:27). What is that love? Is it an emotion? Is it a sensibility? Is it a warm, cuddly feeling about the God of heaven and earth? Is that what love is for God? No. The love in the Scripture that God commands has nothing to do with emotion, and sensibility and feeling. The love in the Bible is an exercise of the will. To love God is to commit your will, your entire being, mind, soul, heart, life to the purpose of pleasing God in everything. When you love God, as we are commanded to love Him, then there will be true and proper fear in your heart. For your concern to please Him in everything is going to give you a holy hatred of anything and everything that doesn't please Him. So when we are talking about the fear of the Lord, we are talking about a coin. On one side, the coin says, *FEAR THE LORD and live and be blessed*; and on the other side, the coin says, *THOU SHALT LOVE the Lord thy God with all thine heart, mind and soul and strength*. To love God is the committal of the will to the life-long purpose of pleasing God in everything.

Now we have been considering "so great salvation". Do you love God? Then the purpose in your heart and in mine is that everything that God in His love and His wisdom knew that I needed, and everything that the Lord Jesus Christ in His love and sacrifice purchased with His poured-out life, and everything that the Holy Spirit wants to make vitally and dynamically real in my life, I must treasure, I cannot neglect, because I love God. I want to please God. That should be the testimony of everyone born into the Father's family.

Love for God. Fear of the Lord. Sides of the same coin. We do not need to be told to fear Him when we have come to the place of loving Him as the Scripture commands us to love Him, because that is the passion of our life, to which all our powers are dedicated, that in every thought and word and deed and relationship and plan and action, the sole ruling, governing purpose of our life is to please Him, to make Him gratified, and satisfied, and happy with us.

Do you love God? Oh, if we love Him as much as we try to convince Him we do when we sing, “Oh, how I love Jesus,”¹ we’re going to hate evil with a holy hatred, we are going to eschew everything that grieves Him and we are going to make certain that we have consciences void of offence toward Him, because our purpose, our one sole, ruling, governing purpose is to glorify Him who loved us and washed us in His blood. This is the fear of the Lord.

Let us bow together in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we’re here a company of men and women living lives in very serious times with dire threats to everything we hold dear and precious. We are custodians of truth. Truth that has come to us by the poured out life of martyrs, who loved that truth enough to die that we might have it intact and pure and complete. And now we are the custodians of that truth. Grant to us Father, that we’ll not be satisfied just to have a mental perception of that “so great salvation.” But that our hearts will demand reality and we will experience it not just once but it will become a daily pattern of our faith and life and walk. Grant to us Father, a holy fear that will make it possible for Thee to reveal the glory and power and authority of Thy dear Son by mighty signs and wonders that the church maybe multiplied and Thy Name glorified. Grant to us Father that we shall have the joy of being part of a generation that accept the provision of the Holy Ghost in His power to the ends of the earth may hear of the last remaining tribe may have an opportunity to turn from their sin receive Thy Son. So to that end Lord we ask Thee to bless the time we spent together thinking and praying and waiting upon Thy. And now Lord we ask that Thou art bless in the close of this service in Jesus Name. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at Bethany Fellowship, Minneapolis, MN on Sunday Evening, June 14, 1987 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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¹ “Oh, How I Love Jesus” By Frederick Whitfield.