

MESSIAH

the Greatest Sermon Ever Sung



TONY PITTENGER

ILLUSTRATED BY JONATHAN MAYER

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HE SHALL FEED HIS FLOCK

The music becomes pastoral again, bringing to mind the rolling hills of a peaceful countryside. This is the music of the compassionate Christ in whom we are called to place our trust.

Lambs that are tattered and torn from their misadventures in the wild, lambs that are ailing and weak, and lambs that are frightened and brokenhearted; all these will be safely led to the green pastures and the still waters. All of His lambs will be led "in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

Isaiah 40:11 He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: and He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

COME UNTO HIM

In the Bible, these words were spoken by Jesus. Jennens has changed them from first person to third person (from "come unto Me" to "come unto Him").

Matthew 11:28-29 Come unto Him, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and He will give you rest. Take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him; for He is meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest for your souls.

Jennens and Handel have arranged *Messiah* so that He never speaks for Himself. Instead, they have Holy Scripture testifying for Him. (Besides, where would you find a soloist accomplished enough to sing as the voice of Christ?)

The music seems to savor the word *come*. This invitation is the most gentle invitation there could be. It is meant to draw even the most timid of souls, the most ashamed, and the most broken among us. There is no scolding in our Savior's voice, only welcome.



BUT THANKS BE TO GOD

And then the chorus joins in, but it is no longer a taunt as much as it is a joyous celebration. The chorus was standing by as the soloists sang about death being swallowed up in victory. Now that death no longer separates any of God's people, they all burst forth in thanksgiving.

Whether you think you can sing or not, here is a choir which, by faith in Christ, you will one day join. One day all tears will be wiped away and we will join our loved ones and all who have died in Christ and we will sing. We will sing for joy to the One "who giveth us the victory!"

1 Corinthians 15:57 But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

IF GOD BE FOR US

Here is confidence. Here is the Christian's assurance. Romans 8:35, 37-39 says,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The truth of this verse is shown in the account of the woman caught in adultery. Here a sinner finds mercy with God as she learns firsthand that nothing can separate her from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:31, 33-34 If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, Who is at the right hand of God, Who makes intercession for us.



BIBLE STUDY OUTLINES

SEVEN-SESSION STUDY

FOUR-SESSION STUDY

1. Comfort Promised
 - a. *Prelude* through Isaiah 40:5
 - b. Haggai 2:6-7 through Malachi 3:3
2. Promise Incarnate
 - a. Isaiah 7:14 through Isaiah 9:6
 - c. *Pastoral Symphony* through Luke 2:14
3. Incarnate as Substitute
 - a. Zechariah 9:9-10 through Matthew 11:30
 - b. John 1:29 through Isaiah 50:6
4. Substitute Victorious
 - a. Isaiah 53:4-5 through Isaiah 53:8
 - b. Psalm 16:10 through Psalm 24:7-10
5. Victory Proclaimed
 - a. Hebrews 1:5 through Romans 10:18
 - b. Psalm 2:1-2 through Revelation 19:16
6. Proclamation Embraced
 - a. Job 19:25-26 through 1 Corinthians 15:52-53
7. Embrace Unending
 - a. 1 Corinthians 15:54 through Romans 8:31,33-34
 - b. Revelation 5:12-13 and *Amen*

1. The darkness of sin and God's plan of salvation.
 - a. *Prelude* through Isaiah 40:5
 - b. Haggai 2:6-7 through Malachi 3:3
 - c. Isaiah 7:14 through Isaiah 60:1
 - d. Isaiah 60:2-3 through Isaiah 9:6
2. The plan of salvation takes form.
 - a. *Pastoral Symphony* through Zechariah 9:9-10
 - b. Isaiah 35:5-6 through Matthew 11:30
 - c. John 1:29 through Isaiah 53:4-5
3. The Messiah suffers, dies, rises, ascends, and establishes his kingdom.
 - a. Isaiah 53:6 through Isaiah 53:8
 - b. Psalm 16:10 through Hebrews 1:6
 - c. Psalm 68:12 through Psalm 2:9
 - d. Revelation 19:6 through Revelation 19:16
4. What does this story mean for me?
 - a. Job 19:25-26 through 1 Corinthians 15:21-22
 - b. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 through 15:52-53
 - c. 1 Corinthians 15:54-55 through Romans 8:31, 33-34
 - d. Revelation 5:12-13 and *Amen*

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ADVANCE PRAISE FOR MESSIAH: THE GREATEST SERMON EVER SUNG

"I first fell in love with Handel's *Messiah* as a teenager when I joined the tenor section of a community choir. My appreciation for the oratorio has only grown with each passing year. Now Tony Pittenger's beautifully illustrated book... unfolds a new layer and has deepened my understanding of the rich scriptures sung to Handel's classic melodies. Most importantly, I will now enjoy *Messiah* with a fuller love and appreciation for *the* Messiah, Jesus Christ."

—MARTY NYSTROM, author and composer

"Handel's *Messiah* is a perennial favorite, perhaps the most well-known musical presentation of scripture texts in the English language. Mayer's illustrations invite us to reconsider those familiar texts in an inspiring and thought-provoking media. It may be that those who experience *Messiah* through these insightful images and Pittenger's Christ-centered commentary will never again hear these texts or listen to this music in quite the same way."

—DENNIS MARZOLF, professor of music

