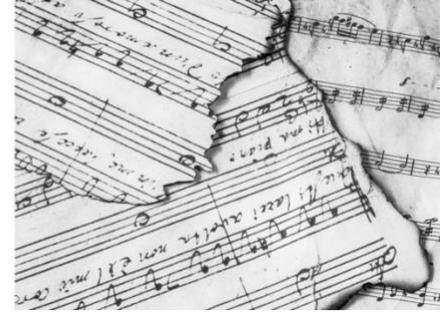




SING SONGS OF HOPE

The Life & Hymns
of Paul Gerhardt



Session 3

Introduction

One day a college student, who was raised in WELS and still attends church but is somewhat disenfranchised, complains, “All our church cares about is doctrine. I understand the Bible is important, but WELS is nit-picky about minor matters, and that just leads to judgmental people. What about caring for our community? What about having worship that isn’t boring? What about developing true friendships in church? Isn’t that important too?” How would you react?

Historical Background: The Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy

After Martin Luther died in 1546, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V invaded Lutheran territories to forcibly reintroduce Catholic doctrine and practice. He soundly defeated the Lutheran forces in the Smalcald War of 1546-1547. For the next generation, the Lutheran church was consumed with a number of doctrinal controversies about how to react. Bitter controversies lead to others, to the point that the very existence of the Lutheran church was threatened. The heir apparent to Luther, Philip Melancthon, lacked strong leadership qualities and often vacillated in order to find common ground among the various Lutheran factions, as well as with other non-Lutheran groups, including the Catholics and Reformed. After a number of failed attempts, these doctrinal controversies were finally settled under Martin Chemnitz’s leadership with the Formula of Concord, the last of the confessional writings which are included in the Book of Concord of 1580. The Book of Concord includes the historic doctrinal statements of Lutheranism which Lutheran pastors still subscribe to today. This is normally viewed as the end of the Late Reformation period. The next period is the Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy, which extended from 1580 until about 1750. This is the age Paul Gerhardt lived in. In the Age of Orthodoxy, Lutheran doctrine is dominant, and the concern was to keep Lutheran doctrine unified. Many theologians wrote extensive Latin textbooks, in which doctrine was arranged logically, systematically, and thoroughly. Well-known Lutheran theologians of this time were John Gerhardt, Abraham Calov, and John Quenstedt. This was an era of academic treatment of Scripture and often featured polemics against other areas of the Christian church, particularly the Catholics and the Reformed, who had been and continued to make inroads into German territories. The Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy is matched with similar eras and approaches in both Reformed and Catholic church history. This was simply the approach of the day. Though many have criticized this era for its dead orthodoxy, its overly tedious and academic approach, and its concern for doctrinal purity for purity’s sake, people like Paul Gerhardt also modeled a pastoral and personal approach and produced a number of devotional writings and hymns.

Hymn: “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth” (CW 100) & “Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See” (CW 219)

This Lenten hymn was originally ten stanzas and was published in 1653 in Johann Crüger’s *Praxis Pietatis Melica*. The hymn, “Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See” – originally the final stanza – is included as a separate hymn with a different tune. Five total stanzas are included in our hymnal.

1 A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth, Our guilt and evil bearing
And, laden with the sins of earth, None else the burden sharing.
Goes patient on, grows weak and faint, To slaughter led without complaint,
That spotless life to offer, Bears shame and stripes and wounds and death,
Anguish and mockery and says, “Willing all this I suffer.”

2 This Lamb is Christ, the soul’s great friend, The Lamb of God, our Savior;
Him God the Father chose to send To gain for us his favor.
“Go forth, my Son,” the Father said, “And free my children from their dread
Of guilt and condemnation. The wrath and stripes are hard to bear,
But by your passion they will share The fruit of your salvation.”

3 “Yes, Father, yes, most willingly I’ll bear what you command me.
My will conforms to your decree; I’ll do what you have asked me.”
O wondrous Love, what have you done! The Father offers up his Son,
Desiring our salvation. O Love, how strong you are to save!
You make his bed within the grave Who built the earth’s foundation.

4 From morn till eve, in all I do, I’ll praise you, Christ, my treasure.
To sacrifice myself for you Shall be my aim and pleasure.
My stream of life shall ever be A current flowing ceaselessly,
Your constant praise outpouring. I’ll treasure in my memory,
O Lord, all you have done for me, Your gracious love adoring.

Lord, when your glory I shall see And taste your kingdom’s pleasure,
Your blood my royal robe shall be, My joy beyond all measure!
When I appear before your throne, Your righteousness shall be my crown;
With these I need not hide me. And there, in garments richly wrought,
As your own bride I shall be brought To stand in joy beside you.

Note all the criticisms of the Age of the Lutheran Orthodoxy in the historical background above. How would you respond to them from this hymn by Gerhardt?

In what ways is Gerhardt’s life reflected in this hymn?

Bible References

Isaiah 53, Hebrews 10:5-14, Isaiah 61:10

John the Baptist famously called Jesus “the Lamb of God.” List a number of reasons why this title was an appropriate one for with Jews of the first century who would have been familiar with Isaiah.

Imagine the conversation between God the Father and God the Son about their plan of salvation, in which the Father tells the Son of his plan to send him to save the world. How would you feel if you were a fly on the wall? If you were God the Father? If you were God the Son?

A dominant biblical picture is Christ as the bridegroom of the church and the church as the bride of Christ and heaven as the wedding celebration. What are some reasons people are nervous or excited on a wedding day? Apply that to standing before God on the Last Day. What are some reasons we would be nervous or excited for that day?

Conclusion: Listen to the Hymn

In what ways do you receive hope for your life from the words or music of this hymn by Paul Gerhardt?