

Rivers and Fountains

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[0 : 00] I've referred to the power of music and song to move the heart and the Lord has greatly used song and music in my grief. That itself has been a life-saving lesson to me.

Don't forget the aid of music in trials. Some contemporary songs driving home wonderful truths of God's word. Lots of them, the old tested and tried hymns that have been helping saints for centuries.

But all of them conveying biblical truth. One that I've known for a long time that has come back to me with fresh power from the very beginning of this trial. Now, it's a song I want to share with you tonight and it carries such a precious Bible truth.

We've sung of it and I want to just lay it before you. A very simple truth, but full of comfort. This song was written some 250 years ago by a Reformed and Baptist pastor in England, John Rylands. He was one of the founders of the Baptist Missionary Society that sent out William Carey, the father of modern missions.

[1 : 11] Sent him to India. That itself is a story of Rylands and Carey's relationship. Rylands wrote lots of hymns. Rylands wrote a book, the father of the Baptist Church. But of all that he wrote, his own favorite was this one.

It's number 543 in your hymnal. I'm going to ask you just to have that open as we're going to make our way through it tonight. 543. Oh Lord, I would delight in thee.

We've sung it a couple times in 35 years. I trust we'll sing it a few more than that in the next month. On the manuscript of this hymn, he wrote this.

Quote, I recollect deeper feelings of mind in composing this hymn than perhaps I ever felt in making any other. So its message clearly gripped his heart and it has gripped many others, mine included. Now, just on the face of it, I find it comforting to know that God would move a John Rylands of 1773 on December 3rd to write a song to help another pastor named John across the ocean and across over two centuries of time to get him through the greatest trial in his life.

[2 : 29] You say, does God really do that kind of thing? Does he really move people's hearts to act in ways that bring blessings to other hearts, specific hearts?

Did he have in mind me when John Rylands? Do you have a God like that? How precious to me are your thoughts, O Lord. How vast are the sum of them.

If I were to count them, they would be more than the sands of the sea. Yes, he thinks of us. He has plans for us. Plans for our good.

Plans to bless us. According to the Bible, plans that were worked out even before time itself.

And he works everything out in conformity with the purpose of that plan. The plans of the Lord stand firm forever. The purposes of his heart through all generations.

[3 : 27] And even the good works of believers. Good works that you do. Good works that John Ryland did. Are good works that God prepared in advance for them to do. Ephesians 2 and verse 10.

So John Ryland's hymn was planned before time to bless my soul in September and October of 2018 at a time of great need. And I trust that you were included in that plan as well.

That after tonight, this hymn will mean something more to you. And bring blessing and comfort to your life. The central truth of this song is found in another song that was written nearly 3,000 years earlier.

And I invite you to turn to that song. It's Psalm 36 in the Psalter. This 36th chapter of the Psalms of David.

And you see it begins of David, the servant of the Lord. And it's for the director of music.

[4 : 38] In other words, it's meant to be used by the whole congregation. So whatever these words are, they apply to more than just David himself. There's truths here for the whole church of God.

And so it's to be used in congregational worship. Something for you and me. Follow along as I read Psalm 36. An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked.

There is no fear of God before his eyes. For in his own eyes, he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin. The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful.

He has ceased to be wise and to do good. Even on his bed, he plots evil. He commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong. Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens.

Your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains. Your justice like the great deep. O Lord, you preserve both man and beast.

[5 : 39] How priceless is your unfailing love. Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house.

You give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life. In your light, we see light. Continue your love to those who know you.

Your righteousness to the upright in heart. May the foot of the proud not come against me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away. See how the evildoers lie fallen, thrown down, not able to rise. Now, notice what he says of those who find refuge in the Lord and in his unfailing love. They feast on the abundance of your house.

You give them drink from your river of delights. In verse 9, for with you is the fountain of life. So tonight, rivers and fountains.

[6 : 45] Do we know the difference? Rivers and fountains. They both have water, don't they? But a river is simply a conveyor belt of water.

It's simply a conduit of water. A channel that carries the water and moves it from one place to another. A fountain, however, is the source of water.

That's the origin of the water. And so the river carries the water, whereas the fountain provides the water that the river then distributes.

Do you see the difference? Fountain and rivers and streams that flow from the fountain. Now, that's a simple picture, but it's one we find in other places in Scripture.

If you've been reading in Ezekiel lately, you find it in chapter 47 in that prophecy, that vision given to Ezekiel. And he sees this river.

[7 : 51] It's a strange river. It's called the river of life. And he sees it. And wherever it goes, it gives life.

So picture a river, and maybe it's flowing through a barren desert, but everywhere the river comes, suddenly it just springs up with fresh life and fauna and flowers.

On each side of the river are a great number of fruit trees flourishing all year long. And then the river empties out into the Dead Sea. You know why it's called the Dead Sea, kids?

Because it's dead. There's no life in there. The water's not clean. The water is not such that will sustain life. And so this river empties into this sulfur-y Dead Sea where nothing grows, and suddenly it's changed into fresh water and gives life to a large number of fish and swarms of living creatures that live wherever the river flows.

Ever have a dream like that? And now the million-dollar question. Where does this river of life have its source? Where does this water come from?

[9 : 08] And Ezekiel tells us it was coming out of the temple. And as he looked closer, he saw that it came out from under the threshold of the temple, from the very sanctuary where God's presence was.

In other words, the river of life flows from the fountain God. He's the fountain. And this river flows from him and conveys life and goodness and blessing from God distributed to the whole world, wherever it flows.

Now, you who know your Bibles know that this river shows up again in the last book of the Bible, the last chapter of the Bible. Revelation 22, 1.

In this new Jerusalem that's come down from heaven to the new earth, the home of righteousness. And John, in vision, sees something.

And he sees. And this is what he writes. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

[10:20] On each side grew the tree of life, bearing 12 crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. Again, what is being said, it's being told that the source of this river of life is God and the Lamb.

And all the manifold blessings of eternal life flow to us from him. He's the fountain. And every river of delight and blessing that comes is from him.

Now, can you see in Psalm 36, then, this is what David is also telling us. He's painting us this picture of the great blessings that are enjoyed by all who take refuge in the Lord.

How priceless is his unfailing love. Everybody who hides in God's love in Jesus Christ. This is what they enjoy.

These rivers of water. Of delight. Now, Spurgeon says heaven will, in the fullest sense, fulfill these words.

[11:23] But even now, those who trust in the Lord are feasting upon his goodness and his blessings. Are they not? Can we not agree with Isaac Watts that the men of grace have found glory begun below?

Celestial fruits on earthly ground from faith and hope may grow. The hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets before we reach the heavenly fields.

Or walk on golden streets. So even now, we begin to partake of this feast that is found in the fountain.

God, a feast of unfailing love. Verse 8 says, they feast on the abundance of your house. It's a picture of a house, not with a scanty cupboard, but with the storehouses of God, full to overflowing. Well supplied with the riches of his grace. It's unending mercies, abundant blessings. You give them drink from your river of delights. Rivers of delights is what they're drinking.

[12:27] What a sumptuous feast when the drink is not merely supersized, but measured not in cups or quarts or gallons or kegs, but measured by the measurement of a river.

River to drink from a river. River sized refreshments, a river of delights. And this simply means that God's people enjoy physical and spiritual blessings that flow to us like rivers of delight for our souls and for our bodies.

But where do these life-giving delights come from? Well, remember, rivers are just conveyor belts. They're just channels that deliver the blessings to us.

So you'll need to swim upstream and trace your blessings back to the fountain, back to the source. And isn't that the problem with us? Too often we're only looking at second causes.

The Bible's ever calling us to look back to the first cause. Don't forget the first cause of these rivers of delight. Now, these many delightful blessings, they come to you through these rivers.

[13:45] They come to you through your wife, through your husband, through your children, through your parents, through your church, through your job, through your nation. All sorts of rivers bringing blessing, delight to you.

They're just the rivers. But God himself is the fountain. And that's what David is telling us here in verse 9. With you is the fountain of all this life that your people who take refuge in you enjoy.

They drink from your river of delight. But with you is the fountain of life. You are the fountain of every blessing from which comes the streams of mercy.

Isn't that what James says? Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father. He's the source. He's the origin. He's the fountain of life and goodness that fills all the rivers and streams of blessing that we ever receive in this world.

So that we can say, apart from you, the fountain, I have no good thing. So now come with me to John Ryland's hymn. And what we find, and even in our arrangement of the hymn, I don't know if the original, if it was tied to Psalm 37.

[15:01] But that's just across the page in our Bible from where we're at in Psalm 36. And what we find in verse 1 especially is that John Ryland's is taking seriously the call of Psalm 37 for to delight yourself in the Lord.

And to do so even in the midst of trouble. Or I should say, especially in the midst of trouble. Especially then to delight yourself in the Lord.

That's the context of the whole psalm of Psalm 37. It's times of trouble. And you can read the trouble. The troubles of the psalmist. And he speaks of them there in verse 39 of the chapter.

The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord. He is their stronghold in time of trouble. And verse chapter 37 is talking about trouble. And that's the time we most need to delight ourselves in the Lord.

So, in answer to that command, Ryland answers in verse 1 of his hymn. O Lord, I would delight in thee.

[16:11] You say to me, delight yourself in the Lord. O Lord, I would. My heart is willing. I would delight in thee. And on thy care depend.

To thee in every trouble flee. My best, my only friend. And now notice the distinction he makes between the streams and the fountain.

In verse 2 of his hymn. When all created streams are dried. Thy fullness is the same. May I with this be satisfied in glory in thy name.

Ryland is saying the streams may dry up. Indeed, the streams will dry up. But the fountain remains full. Thy fullness is the same.

It's nothing less than the fullness of the Godhead that dwells in Christ bodily. And we are complete. We have fullness in him. Colossians 2, 9 and 10.

[17:14] How does this apply? Well, Joseph was a river of God's goodness to me. And every day for nearly 42 years.

She was that river conveying blessing and delight to me. Not a little yellow river. More like a Mississippi river. And that created stream is now dried up for me.

She's gone. And all the grace that was conveyed to me from God through her. Is no longer. To be conveyed to me through this stream.

Now that's life on this cursed planet. During this old order of things. This present order.

Before the new order. When he makes all things new. We heard how he's making people new. His plan is much bigger than just making people new.

[18:14] He's making a whole new creation. A new heaven and a new earth. But for now it's the old order. And the old order of things. In the old order of things. The present state of things.

Created streams dry up. That's just the way it is. Our health fails. Closest friends and loved ones die. And are taken from us.

Nations fall. Freedoms are lost. Churches fail. Spiritual leaders fail us. And disappoint. Marriages fail.

Families fall apart. Family members disappoint. And forsake us. Businesses go under. Jobs are lost. Houses burned. Houses are repossessed.

Retirement nest eggs. Are lost by investments. Gone bad. Or plummeting markets. Or unexpected medical bills. The story is the same. Throughout.

[19:08] Created streams. Go dry. We've been blessed in America. We've been blessed at Grace Fellowship.

I've been blessed in my family. I've been shielded for so much trouble. Over 63 years of my life. That I can begin to believe the lie.

That created streams. Won't dry up. No. That's not their nature. It's not in.

Created streams. To flow forever. So I must come to grips with. Reality. Created streams that used to bring to us all sorts of delights and blessing from God.

Go dry. So what should we do? What should we do when created streams of pleasure dry up? When these times of trouble come upon us?

[20:11] What do you do when God's good blessings. That you receive from this thing. That person. This. This institution. Whatever it is. When it goes dry. And are taken away.

Well if we're wise. We'll move closer. To the fountain. And drink directly. From him. We'll delight ourselves in the Lord himself.

Without the previous. Conveying river. Between. We'll. We were here. He was there. The river. Of blessing.

Was bringing his goodness to us. The stream's gone. So move closer. And drink directly from the fountain himself. From who he is.

What he's done. What he is for us. What he has done. What he is doing. What he's promised yet to do for us. And that's how you find delight in the Lord. In the midst of troubles.

[21:09] You move from the dry stream bed. To the ever flowing fountain. And you just drink. And drink. And eat.

Until you want no more. And when you move from the dry stream bed. To the ever flowing fountain. What do you find? Well you find what.

Ryland found. Verse 3. Of his hymn. No good in creatures. Can be found. But may be found in thee. I must have all things.

And abound. While God is God to me. Here's the good news for us in our losses. That every good that we enjoyed in the created stream.

Can be found further up. In the fountain. God himself. Doesn't it make sense? That if the fountain fills all the streams of pleasure.

[22 : 02] And all the rivers of delight. Then anything we enjoyed in the rivers. And the streams. Can be found. In the fountain. And that just simply means. Times of loss.

Times of bereavement. Are calls. To delight ourselves. In God himself. Just never was the source. Of the goodness that she brought me.

No. God. The fountain. Filled her. And blessed her. And made her the blessing. That she was to me. So any good that I receive from her.

The created stream. Can now be found in the fountain. The very fountain. That filled her. And made her. Such a conveying stream.

Of blessing to me. So we're being called. In times of loss. To get closer to the fountain. And the grief. And the pain. And the loss. Is a reminder.

[22 : 55] That fullness. Is not found. In any. Of God's dreams. Fullness is found. Only in the fountain. Himself. So I must move. Closer to him.

And I must drink. More deeply. Of him. Directly. To find my delight. In him. In trouble. Now how do you do that?

That's a good question. I've been spending. Six weeks. With that one. How do you drink? Directly. From. The fountain. And taste. The goodness. In him. That you've tasted. For 42 years.

Through this stream. I'm encouraged. That this. Though I've not. Come to the. All the conclusions. Of the answer. To that question.

I am. Encouraged. That this is not. An exercise. In futility. Because Jesus Christ. Is not. Just one more. Created stream.

[23 : 50] That can go dry. He's the never. He's the never failing. Fountain of life. He's the fountain. That is full of grace. More full of grace. Than I am of need. More full of grace. Than I am of pain.

More full of grace. Than I am of loss. And from his fullness. Have all we received. And grace. Upon grace. Like the waves.

Of the sea. They just keep crashing. In upon our shore. He gives more grace. When the burdens. Grow greater. So James says. He gives more grace. So great.

More trials. More grace. To added afflictions. He addeth his mercy. To multiplied trials. His multiplied peace. Giveth.

He giveth. And giveth again. And. Remember. He's the fountain. The infinite fountain. And so he's giving out. Of his infinite fullness.

[24 : 47] Which means. He's never the poor. For having given. His fullness. Is the same. Another hymn. That we sing. Fountain of grace. Rich. Full.

And free. That's the fountain. Always. Rich. Full. And free. Doesn't matter. How much we've received. He's still rich. Full. And free. For me. Full pardon strength.

Fountain of grace. Rich. Full. And free. What need I. That is not in thee. Full pardon. Strength. To meet the day. And peace. Which none can take away. That's the lesson.

I want us to see tonight. With clarity. That he really is. All I need. That he really is. More than enough. For.

Anything. That we face. In this world. Of woe. Because the fullness. Of the deity. Dwells in him. Bodily. And I have fullness.

[25 : 46] In him. So when he takes away. A certain stream. In my life. He can supply. The grace. Apart from that channel. So. Be still. My soul.

When dearest friends. Depart. And all is darkened. In the veil of tears. Then shalt thou better know. His love. His heart. Who comes to soothe thy sorrow.

And thy tears. Be still. My soul. Thy Jesus. Can repay. From his own fullness. All he takes away. You see.

It's the fountain. The full fountain. That can repay. All that he takes away. Of the streams. That we've grown. To appreciate. So much.

And I'm finding out. More and more. Of the fullness. Of his loving heart. More of the ways. That he is able. To comfort me. More of the ways. That he's able. To meet my emptiness.

[26 : 40] And my neediness. With his fullness. And I'm finding. There is enough. In him. To keep me. To hold me.

To preserve me. Indeed. To cause me. To even. Delight in him. In. Trouble. You see. In reality. The answer. Of how to drink. From the fountain. When the stream. Goes dry. It's really not. All that complicated. Is it? It's. It's just. Back to the basics. We partake.

Of him. By faith. We. We eat. Of him. By faith. We. We drink. Of him. By faith. By faith. We fellowship. With Christ. Through the word. Of God. And prayer.

So when I. Wake up. In the morning. And I get this book. I stand. Or sit. As I do. Before. The bible.

[27 : 38] And when you open your bible. You're. Standing. Right. By the fountain. The fountain. And it's full. And you say.

Feed me. Feed me. Till I want. No more. Till I need. No more. And when you come. To the throne. Of grace. And you say.

Father in heaven. You're standing. Before the fountain. And it's full. Full for you. And so. That's where. We drink.

Of the fountain. That's how we. We press in. Closer to the fountain. We. We take his word. And we. We plead. And. That's what he says. In verse. Four.

This is back. To John Ryland. Oh that I had. A stronger faith. To look within the veil. To credit. What my savior. Sayeth. Whose word. Can never fail. How do you feed.

[28 : 34] On the fountain. Ryland. I come to his word. And by faith. I take him. At his word. I credit. What he says. That is true. Lord. And as we do that.

By faith. Our hearts. Are filled. With comfort. With encouragement. With hope. So in reality. When I say. How do you drink.

From the fountain. Well. We fellowship. With Christ. Through his word. And through prayer. So in reality. I'm simply being called upon.

To really believe. What I have preached. For. All these years. I'm being called upon. To live. For. Christ. But to live with him. Near him.

To live upon him. Finding in him. All that I need. All that I need. In thee to find. O lamb of God. I come. And so I just need to keep coming. Keep pressing in closer.

[29 : 29] And finding in him. All that I need. Adoniram. And Ann Judson. Were. Two of the first missionaries. To be sent out.

From North America. They. Boarded a ship. In. 1812. Historic year.

In our own. U.S. History. And they sailed to India. And then labored. In Myanmar. Burma. In the course of his labors. Adoniram. Lost.

Two of his wives. I think he may have outlived. His third wife. Maybe some of you know. Better than I. I need to read. Reread his biography. It's on my bed stand now. But when the husband.

Of fellow missionaries. Serving with him. Died. Judson wrote. To the grieving widow. And this is what he said. You are now drinking. The bitter cup. Whose dregs.

[30 : 23] I am somewhat. Acquainted with. Now that's an understatement. He had. He had at least. Lost two wives. And though. For some time. You have been aware. Of its approach. I venture to say.

That it is far bitterer. Than you expected. It's common. For persons. In your situation. To refuse. All consolation. To cling. To the dead. And to fear.

That they. Shall suit suit. Too soon. Be forgotten. The dear. That you will. Too soon. Forget the dear. Object of your affections. But don't be concerned.

I can assure you. That months and months. Of heart-rending anguish. Are before you. Whether you. Want them or not. Yet. Take the bitter cup.

With both hands. And sit down. To your feast. You will soon. Learn a secret. That there is. That there is sweetness. At the bottom.

[31 : 16] So there is the cup. And he has filled it. With woe. And grief. And Judson says. Let me share a secret.

With you. I have taken that cup. And I have drunk it. And I have found. That there is sweetness. At the bottom. It is the sweetness.

Of moving closer. To the fountain. And drinking. Directly. From him. Learning more. Of his love. Jesus. I am resting.

Resting. In the joy. Of what thou art. I am finding out. The greatness. Of thy loving heart. That is. That is the sweetness. At the bottom. It is that. Communion with Christ. It is finding. Just who he is. And his love for you. Well. Whether the streams. In your life. Are dried up. Or you are still. Your streams. Are still running full. And bubbling. Bubbling.

[32 : 14] Like a brook. Still conveying. God's blessings. To you. It is important. To be connecting. The blessings.

To God himself. It is important. To be tracing. All. The blessings. That come to us. Through these rivers. Back to the. The fountain. God himself. To recognize. The fount.

Of every blessing. In every good thing. We enjoy. So that we are. Acknowledging him. Indeed. That we are. Enjoying him. As we're enjoying. The river of delights.

That he's bringing to us. Do you know how to enjoy the giver. In his gifts. Delight yourself. In the creator. As you enjoy his creation.

And this keeps his. Created streams. From becoming idols. That compete with him. For our hearts. And it gives glory to God. And it teaches us.

[33 : 10] To find our greater delight. In him. Not his gifts. So that if he takes away. Some good gift. You'll still have the fountain. Himself. And all the goodness.

Of him. To delight you. Ryland goes on. In the remaining verses. Of the song. To tell us. Just. How to delight. Ourselves.

In him. In verse five. He that has made. My heaven secure. Will hear all good provide. While Christ is rich. Can I be poor. What can I want beside. His goodness is going to get me.

All the way to heaven. He'll provide all the good. I need. As long as Christ is rich. And there's fullness. In him. How can I be poor. I'm united to him. I'm joined to him. What can I want.

What can I want beside. Oh Lord. I cast my care on thee. I triumph. And adore. Henceforth. My great concern. Shall be. To love. And please thee more. As you pray for me.

[34 : 10] Pray that I will not. Endlessly. Grieve with. Sadness. For the loss. Of the stream.

To the lack of joy. To where that becomes my. Preoccupation. Oh. What I've lost. What I've lost. What I've lost. But that I will find.

My delight in the Lord. So that my. Great concern. Will be. Not all. All that I've lost. All that I've lost. But my great concern.

Will be to love. And to please him. More. Let's stand. And sing this. To the Lord himself. Who. Who comes telling us. Delight yourself in me. Come.

Closer to me. The fountain. And. Let's make this. Our. Response. To him. Oh. Lord. I would. Delight. In thee. Number. Five. 543.