

## WEY VALLEY – WEEKLY CIRCUIT LETTER – 18 December 2024

Barrie Tabraham

### “Jesus, the First and Last” – *Singing the Faith* 329

Dear friends,



This is not the first time I've written on the subject of hymnody, but the other day I found myself singing a hymn by Charles Wesley that is such a beautifully succinct summary of the whole wonderful work of God's salvation, that I felt compelled to write some thoughts about it.

Today, of course, some of Charles Wesley's hymns would appear to be ridiculously long. *My heart is full of Christ, and longs its glorious matter to declare* (StF 506) for example, originally consisted of no fewer than twenty-one stanzas in all (!) though only the first 4 verses appear in *Singing the Faith*. The famous hymn, *Come, O thou Traveller unknown* (StF 461) had 14 verses, though 12 actually appear in our current hymn book. However, just as it has been said that it's far harder to preach for 5 minutes than 25 (and make sense!), it could well be argued that you would have to be a genius to encapsulate one's whole Christian journey in a mere twelve lines.

In this respect, *Jesus, the First and Last* is a little masterpiece:

*Jesus, the First and Last,  
On thee my soul is cast:  
Thou didst thy work begin  
By blotting out my sin;  
Thou wilt the root remove,  
And perfect me in love.*

*Yet when the work is done,  
The work is but begun:  
Partaker of thy grace,  
I long to see thy face;  
The first I prove below,  
The last I die to know.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ is indeed the 'Alpha and Omega – the beginning and the end'. Charles Wesley begins by reminding us that, from the very beginning, God is always 'Son' to us, as it were. He was, as we say in the creed, '*begotten, not made*'. In other words, our God is not remote from us – he has not set in motion our created order and let us get on with things by ourselves. Just as time itself was part of creation, so – as we celebrate in this season of Advent – he will be there in all his power and love at its conclusion. And we can rest assured too, that from the moment as individuals we take our first, faltering footsteps of faith (at whatever age that might be), so our Lord will be there to guide us safely home.

Then Charles makes the central point upon which our salvation depends. Christ's death and resurrection – even though they occurred over 2000 years ago – are the decisive events that have defeated the twin enemies of sin and death for us, and have opened the path to eternal life. Of course, this is a *relative* change in our status – that, though deserving punishment for our sins, they are 'blotted out' and we are treated as though we are innocent – which theologians call 'justification'. But this is only a beginning. Wesley reminds us that '*the work is but begun*', because a real change has to occur – the process which theologians (who love big words) call 'sanctification'.

Notice how Wesley weaves together in the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse these two strands: God's loving purposes for us, through his grace, and our own response. For Charles, our longing to see God's face and to share in God's very nature is always made in response to what he has done for us in Christ.

Yes, we may fall and fail in our attempts to live good Christian lives. Yes, we may sometimes wonder whether our churchgoing, praying and Bible reading have really made a difference. But in this life, we can indeed have the assurance that 'the work' of salvation (our transformation into the people God intends us to be) has indeed begun. And even if there is a sense in which we are all 'works in progress' and *being* saved, then all things will be made new in heaven – the life which God has prepared for us and which we shall share with Him.



**A Prayer:** Gracious God, we thank you that our hymns can not only lift our spirits and help us to worship you on Sundays, but teach us important truths about our journey of faith. Help us to be open to your Spirit of love, so that we may grow as your daughters and sons, ever more Christ-like, as we follow in our Lord's footsteps. This we ask, for your love's sake, Amen.

*Barrie Tabraham*

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## Resources/Good News

### **President and Vice-President Christmas Message**

The President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference's Christmas message focuses on self-care and "hushing the overwhelming noise" of the pressures around us.

The Revd Helen Cameron and Mrs Carolyn Godfrey offer a timely message of hope and stillness amidst life's overwhelming noise. Recognising the challenges of modern existence – from global news to personal struggles – the message encourages community members to pause, reflect and listen for "the song of the angels".



[President and Vice-President Christmas message 2024 - The Methodist Church](#)