

CFBC Hymns Class 37

Francis Scott Key (1779-1843)

*Lord, with glowing heart I'd praise thee
For the bliss thy love bestows,
For the pard'ning grace that saves me,
and the peace that from it flows:
Help, O God, my weak endeavor;
This dull soul to rapture raise;
Thou must light the flame,
or never can my love be warned to praise.*

*Earth, hear thy Makers voice, thy great Redeemer own;
Believe, obey, rejoice, and worship Him alone.
Cast down thy pride, thy sin deplore and bow before
The Crucified.*

Introduction to Francis Scott Key

The name Francis Scott Key is well known to most Americans. He is the author of this Country's national anthem, *The Star-Spangled Banner*. Key's father was an army officer who fought with distinction in the Revolutionary War. The son studied law and served three terms as district attorney for the District of Columbia.

But there was another side to the man. Francis Key was a committed Christian. He was a Sunday School teacher, and a writer of devotional verse. In 1823, he became a member of a committee charged with preparing a new hymnal for the Protestant Episcopal Church. In addition to the anthem mentioned above, Key also authored a couple of hymns that are still in use: *Lord, with Glowing Heart I'd Praise Thee*, and *Before the Lord We Bow*.

The latter is actually a strongly-worded national hymn, written for the July 4th celebration in 1832...

Before the Lord we bow, the God who reigns above,
And rules the world below, boundless in power and love.
Our thanks we bring in joy and praise,
Our hearts we raise to heav'n's high King.

The nation Thou hast blessed may well Thy love declare,
From foes and fears at rest, protected by Thy care.
For this fair land, for this bright day,
Our thanks we pay, gifts of Thy hand.

Because it is nonspecific with regard to the details, the hymn could be used by other countries besides the United States. It says in its final stanzas:

Earth, hear thy Maker's voice, thy great Redeemer own;
Believe, obey, rejoice, and worship Him alone.
Cast down thy pride, thy sin deplore,
And bow before the Crucified.

And when in power He comes, O may our native land,
From all its rending tombs, send forth a glorious band;
A countless throng, ever to sing
To heav'n's high King salvation's song.

<https://wordwisehymns.com/2010/08/01/today-in-1779-francis-scott-key-born/>

The Christian Testimony of Francis Scott Key (Excerpts)

By Rick Williams
June 01, 2004

Lost Freedom

In the wee hours of September 13, 1861, Baltimore newspaper editor F. K. Howard was awakened by the ringing of his doorbell. When he opened his door, he found armed men with a warrant for his arrest. They entered the residence and illegally searched every room in the house.

As the sun rose over the horizon that same morning, Howard looked through the jail cell window of Fort McHenry and thought about a poem — a poem that had been penned exactly forty-seven years to the day earlier by his grandfather. The title of the poem was *Defense of Fort McHenry*. The Christian theme contained in the fourth stanza of *Defense of Fort McHenry* was particularly poignant to Mr. Howard that morning:

O thus be it ever when free men shall stand
Between their loved home and the war's desolation!
Blest with victory and peace may the heav'n-rescued land
Praise the power that hath made and preserved us a nation!
Then conquer we must when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto — "In God is our trust."

And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Readers will recognize this last line by the more popular song title, *The Star-Spangled Banner*, written by Francis Scott Key in 1814 as the British pounded Fort McHenry during the War of 1812. As dawn broke over Fort McHenry that morning, Key was elated to see the Stars and Stripes still waving. The despot, King George III, had been resisted! Key, convinced that God had looked with favor on Baltimore, made his soulful out-pouring a song of thanksgiving.

Lost History

Key was once known by every schoolboy in the nation as America's "Poet, Patriot, Christian," yet most children today could not identify him as our national anthem's author, much less know of his zealous Christian faith. But were it not for Key's faith in Christ, it is unlikely *The Star-Spangled Banner* would have ever been composed.

The one person most likely to have influenced young Key for the Kingdom was his paternal grandmother. Mrs. Key was totally blind...According to his descendants, the saintly grandmother's "Christian fortitude under her terrible affliction impressed itself deeply upon [Key's] pure and highly sensitive nature, and no doubt had much to do with his own sublime and perfect faith." Key became active in the Episcopal Church, and his faith was most public.

A devout Christian, he was a regular attendant at church affairs and took an active part in all spiritual affairs. At family prayers, which he regularly conducted twice a day, every member of his family...was required to be in attendance. In the Sunday school he taught a Bible class of young men for many years, and was one of the vestrymen of St. John's Episcopal Church in Georgetown.

Key was not only a dynamic Christian, he was a brilliant lawyer. And his law practice, along with his political involvement, providentially put him in close friendship with some of the most influential men of his day.

One of those friends was the firebrand anti-federalist and eccentric Virginia Congressman, John Randolph. The beneficiary of a keen intellect, Randolph was nonetheless a lonely man prone to seasons of despondency, likely because his Christianity was at best questionable. Randolph's faith had been shaken by reading infidels like Voltaire. He confessed his doubts to Key, writing that he "possessed so little of pagan philosophy, or of Christian patience, as frequently to be driven to the brink of despair." But Key did his best to bring Randolph into the fold.

Key overlooked Randolph's "eccentricities and admired him for his wonderful intellect, the courage of his convictions, and his freedom from party spirit." Key was aggressive in standing for the Faith and attacking the strongholds of the enemy. Randolph's vicious sarcasm had won him many arguments and enemies, but Key was undeterred. He was one of the few contemporaries of Randolph's who could get by with a direct challenge to the Virginian. Key responded to Randolph cynicism in a letter:

I don't believe there are any new objections to be discovered to the truth of Christianity, though there may be some in presenting old ones in a new dress. My faith has been greatly confirmed by the infidel writers I have read: and I think such would be their effect upon anyone who has examined the evidences.... Men may argue ingeniously against our faith, as indeed they may against anything — but what can they say in defense of their own — I would carry the war into their own territories, I would ask them what they believe....

Lost Culture?

Carrying "the war into their own territories" is something that, sadly, American Christians as a whole are failing to do. Lacking a vibrant, conquering faith, the American church risks the very real possibility of losing its liberties. While the Christian Faith of many of our Founding Fathers, and of those like Francis Scott Key who followed after them, laid a sure foundation for our country's posterity, history teaches us, "The condition upon which God has given liberty to man is eternal vigilance." Without that eternal vigilance, and "carrying the war into their own territories," we could very well end up as Key's grandson did, contemplating the words of some shadowy hymn and reminiscing from a jail cell about the glories of our forefathers.

Francis Scott Key knew that the Gospel could free not only the dark and gloomy soul of a John Randolph, but that it was the sole guarantor of political liberty as well.

No specific charges were ever levied against Key's grandson. The editor's offense was simply that he dared criticize the current occupant of the White House — Abraham Lincoln. Thus some of the liberties Francis Scott Key enjoyed and wrote so eloquently about had been lost in just one generation. But the patriotic fire that once dwelt in Key's heart still lived in his grandson's:

We came out of prison as we had gone in, holding in the same just scorn and detestation the despotism under which the country was prostrate, and

with a stronger resolution than ever to oppose it by every means to which, as American freemen, we had the right to resort.

May we, by the blessings of providence, hold “the same just scorn and detestation” for despotism, and may we not forget that only Jesus Christ can free a man’s soul and a nation’s spirit. For it is only through Christ that America can truly be “the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

<https://chalcedon.edu/magazine/the-christian-testimony-of-francis-scott-key-1>

Francis Scott Key—Christian (Excerpts)

Published January 2, 2005

In late August of 1814 British forces captured and burned Washington D.C. The major buildings of the city, including the capitol building and the White House, were burned before the British withdrew. (Note: this was a reprisal for American misdeeds in Canada) As the soldiers returned to their ships they took Dr. William Beanes prisoner. The British Navy then sailed north to the nearby city of Baltimore.

British ships arrived off the coast of Baltimore and were getting ready to attack the city. It was then that Francis Scott Key and John S. Skinner boarded one of the British ships seeking the release of Dr. Beanes. Francis Scott Key, while on board the British vessel, watched as the British bombarded Fort McHenry which protected the city of Baltimore. The bombardment took place on September 13-14, 1814, and lasted for twenty-five hours.

When the bombardment stopped Francis Scott Key saw that the flag of the American Union still stood over the fort. The British attempt to take the fort and Baltimore had failed. That is when he wrote the *Star Spangled Banner*, a poem that would later become the American national anthem.

Most Americans only know the first verse of their national anthem, but there are actually four verses. My favorite verse is the last one...

*Oh! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand
Between their loved homes and the war's desolation!
Blest with victory and peace, may the heaven-rescued land
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation.
Then conquer we must, for our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust."
And the star-spangled banner forever shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!*

Key was a lawyer, a poet and a Christian. Besides the Star Spangled Banner, he also wrote hymns; here is part of one of his hymns.

*Lord, with glowing heart I'd praise thee For the bliss thy love bestows,
For the pard'ning grace that saves me, and the peace that from it flows:
Help, O God, my weak endeavor; This dull soul to rapture raise;
Thou must light the flame, or never can my love be warned to praise.*

Key's view of man was biblical. He understood that salvation was from the Lord and it was His work in us that brings us to repentance and salvation. In his hymn titled *Before the Lord We Bow* he wrote:

*Earth, hear thy Makers voice, thy great Redeemer own;
Believe, obey, rejoice, and worship Him alone.
Cast down thy pride, thy sin deplore and bow before
The Crucified.*

Francis Scott Key knew that all people are in need of salvation, and salvation was to be found only in Jesus Christ *The Crucified*. The modern idea that there are many paths to God, and we may each choose our own path, was a foreign concept to Francis Scott Key. This is why he wrote *Believe, obey, rejoice, and worship Him alone*...Christ is the one and ONLY means of salvation...there is no other viable option...It's vital that we love all others enough to tell them this essential truth in love. This is what American Episcopalian Francis Scott Key lived.

His view of Christian death is seen in this verse which must have been a comfort to those he left behind at his passing from this world to the next. He wrote:

I have been a base and groveling thing
And now the dust of the earth my home,
But now I know that the end of my woe,
And the day of my bliss is come.
Then let them, like me, make ready their shrouds,
Nor shrink from the mortal strife,
And like me they shall sing, as to heaven they spring,
Death is not the end of life

<https://www.christianforums.com/threads/francis-scott-key-christian.1172379/>

Lord, with glowing heart I'd praise thee

Lord, with glowing heart I'd praise thee
For the bliss thy love bestows,
For the pard'ning grace that saves me,
And the peace that from it flows;
Help, O God, my weak endeavor;
This dull soul to rapture raise;
Thou must light the flame, or never
Can my love be warmed to praise.

Praise, my soul, the God that sought thee,
Wretched wand'rer far astray;
Found thee lost, and kindly brought thee
From the paths of death away;
Praise, with love's devoutest feeling,
Him who saw thy guilt-born fear,
And, the light of hope revealing,
Bade the blood-stained cross appear.

Praise thy Saviour God that drew thee
To that cross, new life to give,
Held a blood-sealed pardon to thee,
Bade thee look to him and live;
Praise the grace whose threats alarmed thee,
Roused thee from thy fatal ease,
Praise the grace whose promise warmed thee,
Praise the grace that whispered peace.

Lord, this bosom's ardent feeling
Vainly would my lips express;
Low before thy footstool kneeling,
Deign thy suppliant's prayer to bless:
Let thy love, my soul's chief treasure,
Love's pure flame within me raise,
And, since words can never measure,
Let my life show forth thy praise.

Original Trinity Hymnal, #69

(To the tune of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus")

WordWise Hymns Comments on “Lord, with glowing heart I'd praise thee” (Excerpts)

The present hymn is a fine one, and it's surprising that few current hymn books include it...

Our right to come before God to offer our praise and prayer is based on the our cleansing from sin through the shed blood of the sacrifice (Christ). Then it's the indwelling Holy Spirit who “ignites” our prayer and praise...It is through Christ and His finished work on the Cross that we may approach the throne of God in prayer...The lighting of the flame within the hearts of God's people is accomplished by the Holy Spirit. Through Him, we are equipped and empowered to approach God.

Stanza 1) Lord, with glowing heart I'd praise Thee,
For the bliss Thy love bestows,
For the pardoning grace that saves me,
And the peace that from it flows:
Help, O God, my weak endeavour;
This dull soul to rapture raise:
Thou must light the flame, or never
Can my love be warmed to praise.

Stanza 4) Lord, this bosom's ardent feeling
Vainly would my lips express.
Low before Thy footstool kneeling,
Deign Thy suppliant's prayer to bless:
Let Thy grace, my soul's chief treasure,
Love's pure flame within me raise;
And, since words can never measure,
Let my life show forth Thy praise.

Additional Comments on the hymn...

In considering God's grace in the salvation of sinful man, one turns to focus on the cross-work of Christ in paying the penalty our sin deserves, and on the fact that we become beneficiaries of that payment when we look to Christ in simple faith, apart from any work or merit of our own. This seems to be what Francis Scott Key has in mind in the first stanza's phrase, “...the pard'ning grace that saves me,” and the third stanza's, “Held a blood-sealed pardon to thee, Bade thee look to Him and live.” The hymn also focuses, in the second and third stanzas, on God's gracious initiative in seeking us out and drawing us to become recipients of His grace. Romans 5:8 comes to mind: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

<https://faithalone.org/journal-articles/a-hymn-of-grace-lord-with-glowing-heart-id-praise-thee/>

Before the Lord we bow

Francis Scott Key

Before the Lord we bow, the God Who reigns above,
And rules the world below, boundless in power and love.
Our thanks we bring in joy and praise, our hearts we raise
To Heaven's high King.

The nation Thou hast blest may well Thy love declare,
From foes and fears at rest, protected by Thy care.
For this fair land, for this bright day, our thanks we pay,
Gifts of Thy hand.

May every mountain height, each vale and forest green,
Shine in Thy Word's pure light, and its rich fruits be seen!
May every tongue be tuned to praise, and join to raise
A grateful song.

Earth, hear thy Maker's voice, thy great Redeemer own;
Believe, obey, rejoice, and worship Him alone.
Cast down thy pride, thy sin deplore and bow before
The Crucified.

And when in power He comes, O may our native land,
From all its rending tombs, send forth a glorious band.
A countless throng, ever to sing to Heaven's high King
Salvation's song.

If life's pleasures charm thee

Francis Scott Key

1 If life's pleasures charm thee,
Give them not thy heart.
Lest the gift ensnare thee
From thy God to part;
His favor seek, His praises speak—
Fix here thy hope's salvation;
Serve Him, and He will ever be
The Rock of thy salvation.

2 If distress befall thee,
Painful though it be,
Let not grief appall thee—
To your Savior flee;
He ever near, thy prayer will hear,
And calm your perturbation;
The waves of woe shall ne'er o'erflow
The Rock of thy salvation.

3 When earth's prospects fail thee,
Let it not distress;
Better comforts wait thee—
Christ will surely bless;
To Jesus flee—thy prop He'll be,
Thy heav'nly consolation;
For griefs below cannot o'er throw
The Rock of thy salvation.

4 Dangers may approach thee;
Let them not alarm;
Christ will ever watch thee,
And protect from harm;
He near thee stands, with mighty hands,
To ward off each temptation;
To Jesus fly; He's ever nigh,
The Rock of thy salvation.

5 Let not death alarm thee,
Shrink not from his blow;
For thy God shall arm thee,
And vict'ry bestow,
For death shall bring to thee no sting,
The grave no desolation;
'Tis sweet to die with Jesus nigh,
The Rock of thy salvation.

Faith is the Christian's evidence

Francis Scott Key

Faith is the Christian's evidence
Of things unseen by mortal eye;
It passes all the bounds of sense,
And penetrates the most sky.

Things absent it can set in view,
And bring far distant prospects home;
Events long past it can renew,
And long foresee the things to come.

With strong persuasion, from afar,
The heavenly region it surveys,
Embraces all the blessings there,
And here enjoys the promises.

By faith a steady course we steer,
Through ruffling storms, and swelling seas,
O'ercome the world, keep down our fear,
And still possess our souls in peace.

By faith, we pass the vale of tears
Safe and serene, though oft distress'd
By faith subdue the king of fears,
And go rejoicing to our rest.

Published 1826
Hymns of the Protestant Episcopal Church

Our Father who art in Heaven

Francis Scott Key

Father in heaven! does God who made
And rules this universal frame—
Say, does he own a father's love,
And answer to a father's name?

Saviour divine! cleanser of guilt,
Redeemer of a ruined race!
These are thy cheering words, and this
The kind assurance of thy grace.

My God! my Father! may I dare—
I, all debased, with sin defiled—
These awful, soothing, names to join;
Am I thy creature and thy child?

Art thou my Father? then no more
My sins shall tempt me to despair;
A father pities and forgives,
And hears a child's repentant prayer.

Art thou my Father? let me strive
With all my powers to do thy will,
To make thy service all my care,
And all thy kind commands fulfil.

Art thou my Father? teach my heart
Compassion for another's woe,
And ever, to each child of thine,
A brother's tenderness to show.

Art thou my Father? then I know
When pain, or want, or griefs oppress,
They come but from a father's hand,
Which wounds to heal, afflicts to bless.

Art thou my Father? then in doubt
And darkness when I grope my way,
Thy light shall shine upon my path,
And make my darkness like thy day.

Art thou my Father? then no more
Tremble, my soul, at death's alarms:
He comes a messenger of love,
To bear me to a Father's arms.

My God! my Father! I am vile,
Prone to forget thee, weak, and blind:
Be thou my help, my strength, my trust,
Hope of my heart! light of my mind!

America's Unheralded National Missionary: Francis Scott Key

Hardly an American alive does not know something about Francis Scott Key. Most know him as the writer of our national anthem, *The Star-Spangled Banner*. Many may know that he wrote it while stranded on a ship in Baltimore harbor during the night-long attack on Fort McHenry, following which "our flag was still there!"

Some may know that he was a successful attorney who had appeared many times before the U.S. Supreme Court, that he served as a United States district attorney, or that he served as an officer with distinction during the American Revolutionary War. Arguably his most high-profile case as a defense attorney before the Supreme Court was representing Aaron Burr against charges of treason when no other lawyer would. Guilty or not, Key believed that everyone deserves a fair trial.

Very few know that he was a dedicated Christian who was responsible for one of the largest missionary movements within his beloved United States. Key was a passionate proponent of spreading the Gospel across America by establishing Missionary Sunday Schools. In fact, he authored a book entitled *Missionary Sunday School* in which set out a plan to start Sunday Schools across the country “where individuals from lower economic classes heard the Gospel and learned to read and write using the Bible as a primary text.” The schools aimed to reach children “who rarely or never attend church.”

He was a founder of the American Sunday School Union (ASSU) and served as its manager and vice president from its beginning until his death, a span of 19 years. In 1830, Key chaired a meeting of the ASSU in Washington in which it was resolved that “in reliance upon Divine aid, (the ASSU) will, within two years, establish a Sunday school in every destitute place where it is practicable, throughout the Valley of the Mississippi.” That monumental task involved an attempt to reach more than four million people living in an area over 1.3 million square miles.

The Mississippi Enterprise has been hailed as “one of the most aggressive Sunday school programs ever launched.” One newspaper covering the conclave called it “the most important meeting ever held in the United States.” The strategy was to start a class, teach it, then turn it over to a devoted Christian man or woman to teach it. Then, go out and do it again.

The ASSU commissioned between 80 and 100 new missionaries each year. A total of 61,299 Sunday school projects were established by the ASSU missionaries over a period of 50 years. By that time there were 407,242 teachers, in excess of 2.6 million pupils and more than a million books in the Sunday school libraries.

Francis Scott Key may be best known as the poet who wrote the Star-Spangled Banner, but his influence in developing, promoting, and sustaining what may have been the greatest missionary movement in the United States will have a far greater eternal reward.

<https://missionsbox.org/missionary-bio/americas-unheralded-national-missionary-francis-scott-key>