



CALL TO WORSHIP

Harpeth Baptist Church

Youth Sunday

The Importance of Youth in the Church

Text: Luke 2; I Timothy 4

Responsive Reading: Psalm 145:1-10

8:30 service

- 622 This Is the Day
- 692 Praise Him, All Ye Little Children
- 690 Jesus Loves Me
- 537 In My Heart There Rings a Melody

11:00 Service

- 32 Crown Him With Many Crowns
- 135 Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us
- 268 The King of Love My Shepherd Is
- 23 O Great God

This week's special music

[The King of Love My Shepherd Is](#)

History of Hymns: "The King of Love My Shepherd Is"

by Katie Jarrett for umcdiscipleship.org

"The King of Love My Shepherd Is"
by Henry Williams Baker.

*The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never.
I nothing lack if I am his,
and he is mine forever.*

Sir Henry Williams Baker (1821-1877), the author of this hymn and also the vicar of Monkland Priory Church in Herefordshire, England, is said to have spoken stanza three of this hymn as his last words before dying:

*Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love He sought me,
And on His shoulder gently laid,
And home, rejoicing, brought me.*

He wrote many hymns of fine emotion and intellect, and yet his lyrical transcription of the 23rd Psalm was what came to him as he approached "death's dark vale." He died in 1877 in the parsonage of the church where he had served for more than thirty years, a country vicar in the poor edges of Her Majesty Queen Victoria's mighty Britain.

Sir Henry Baker would not at first glance be a candidate for "perverse and foolish." The son of a vice-admiral, he was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, and was ordained in 1844 as a priest in the Church of England. After a curacy, he became the vicar of Monkland. He

served his whole adult life in this parish, even after inheriting a baronetcy upon the death of his father. He lived in a nearby parsonage as a bachelor, believing in the celibacy of the clergy, and was cared for by his sister.

A great passion of his life, however, was the production of the innovative Hymns Ancient & Modern (1861), a monumental milestone in the history of English hymnody and a collection of great variety and musical effectiveness. Most congregations in Anglican churches were not singing hymns during the middle of the nineteenth century, being devoted only to metrical psalms. Methodists and evangelicals in England were singing hymns during the first half of the nineteenth century, and their influence spurred the Anglicans to join the ranks of hymn singers by the second half of the century.

A notable feature of this landmark hymnal was the printing of text and tune for each hymn on the same page, so any singer could see and sing the distinctive pairings. Each musical setting was intended to enhance the poetic text of the hymn, making the sensibilities and emotion of the hymn clear. Until this time, most published hymnals contained text only, or a limited number of tunes meant to be used repeatedly with various texts.

Sir Henry Baker led a committee of hymn writers, composers, and editors who compiled the hymns for publication. Many of these contributors were adherents of the Oxford movement. The Oxford movement was an ecclesiastical trend that Susan Drain (author of The Anglican

Church in Nineteenth Century Britain: Hymns Ancient and Modern) describes as a deep regard for church rituals and the sacraments, respect for Apostolic traditions and the Roman Catholic Church, and a desire by clergy to preserve the past. With this standpoint in mind, many of the hymns chosen were translated from medieval Latin and German sources. Others were accepted from hymn writers of the day and edited, so much so that one contributor said “HA&M” should mean “Hymns Asked for and Mutilated.”

“The King of Love my Shepherd Is,” a metrical paraphrase of Psalm 23, was written by Baker for the Second Edition of Hymns Ancient & Modern in 1868, and included in the appendix. His friend John Bacchus Dykes (1823-1876), a musical editor on the committee, wrote the tune DOMINUS REGIT ME specifically for it, which is the title of Psalm 23 in the Latin Vulgate translation. Many writers have commented on the compelling beauty of this well-suited tune and text, which British hymnologist Ian Bradley described as a regularity of rhythm and even balance between rising lines in phrases one and three and falling lines in phrases two and four. The unique double rhymes Baker uses in many places at the end of lines two and four are well-enhanced by this tune.

Later, Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) sought to republish the hymn in The English Hymnal (1906) and was denied the right to use the tune. He then paired Baker’s text with his own arrangement of an Irish Air, ST. COLUMBA.

The hymn opens with a beautiful title for God: “The King of Love.” The first stanza has a calm, familiar feeling of repeated words – “is...His”; “never...forever.” Baker tied in ideas about Jesus as the Shepherd from several different places in Scripture, including John 10:11. The hymn uses a lot of verbs and describes the Shepherd by his actions.

Where streams of living water flow
My ransomed soul he leadeth;
And where the verdant pastures grow,
With food celestial feedeth.

Baker references “living” water, possibly from Revelation 22:1, which describes a vision of heaven with living water flowing from the throne of God. The stanza continues to point to heaven with a “ransomed soul” and “celestial food.” But these are not presented in a grandiose way, simply as the good care-taking of the Shepherd in the actions of leading and feeding.

In stanza three, cited above in the first paragraph, Baker added Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-6) to the verses from Psalm 23. The singers of this hymn may picture themselves as the lost sheep using words with the implication of misguided self-will (“perverse...foolish”). The Shepherd is described with self-giving words (“in love... gently...rejoicing”). Lines two and four of stanza three end with double, or two-syllable, rhymes: a testimony of what is being done for the singer through the actions of the Shepherd. (“sought me... brought me”).

In death’s dark vale I fear no ill,
With thee, dear Lord, beside me
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.

Stanza four also ends lines two and four with double rhymes. Baker emphasizes the redemptive character of the Shepherd by including the cross in the last line, a reference not from Psalm 23 but from gospel crucifixion accounts. The alliteration of “death’s dark vale” and “dear Lord” is paralleled in lines three and four by “staff, still and comfort, cross.” The repeated sounds emphasize the physical imagery.

Thou spread’st a table in my sight;
Thine unction grace bestoweth;
And oh, what transport of delight
From thy pure chalice floweth.

Here Baker transforms the table of Psalm 23 into the Communion table, which offers “unction, grace,” and a “pure chalice overflowing.” “Unction” is a historical term that means anointing for the purpose of healing. A “chalice” has been associated for centuries with the cup that holds the wine in the Eucharist. These words are more typical of Sir Henry Williams Baker’s era than our own. The picture of Christ’s body and blood holding out grace, healing, and forgiveness of sins is a lovely example of Victorian lyric poetry.

And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never
Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise
Within Thy house forever.

The last stanza parallels the first in structure and uses the same rhyming words in lines two and four. It climaxes with the allusion to John 10:11 and the Good Shepherd’s unfailing goodness and a prayer to worship forever. After all that God has done—God’s actions—now the singer responds with the music of a grateful heart and looks forward to life in heaven with the Shepherd.