

'We Gather Together' in a Time of Oppression

I sat down at the piano the other night to get my fingers warmed up for a gathering at which I was supposed to play. Knowing that Thanksgiving was fast approaching, I flipped through a hymnal, searching for a few season-appropriate songs, and alighted on "[We Gather Together](#)."

As I played and sang, the words of this familiar hymn hit me in a new way, as I suddenly realized their relevance to what many of us have experienced this last year. Perhaps this should not be surprising, for brief research reveals that the hymn was born out of a time of persecution in the late 16th century. Here are the words and some thoughts about how they relate to us today.

We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing;
He chastens and hastens His will to make known.
The wicked oppressing now cease from distressing.
Sing praises to His Name; He forgets not His own.

Oppression? Check. Whether it's [Australia](#), [Austria](#), or the [United States](#), almost every country worldwide is experiencing some form of oppression from its leadership, particularly through COVID-related restrictions. And while those leaders try to tell us that said oppression is for our good, we might as well call it what it is: it *is* wickedness.

But how are we responding to that oppression? Are we gloom and doom? Are we ready to throw in the towel? According to this hymn, that's the opposite of what we're supposed to do. We are to stop worrying and accept the oppression as chastening which helps draw us closer to God. And just as a cheering reminder, God knows those who belong to Him and will never leave nor forsake them.

Beside us to guide us, our God with us joining,
Ordaining, maintaining His kingdom divine;
So from the beginning the fight we were winning;
Thou, Lord, were at our side, all glory be Thine!
We all do extol Thee, Thou Leader triumphant,
And pray that Thou still our Defender will be.
Let Thy congregation escape tribulation;
Thy Name be ever praised! O Lord, make us free!

It's easy to feel like the world is falling apart, that we are in the fight alone, and that those who stand for what's right and true are losing the battle. But as these verses explain, those who put their trust in God, allowing Him to guide and defend them, are on the winning side already, and can rest in His sovereign orchestrations.

As we gather together this Thanksgiving, let's call to mind the words of this centuries-old hymn. Nothing is new under the sun. Those who have gone before us have experienced suffering and oppression as well in their fight for truth and righteousness. But in the midst of their trials and tribulations, they leaned on the mighty arms of the One who is the Victor over all. May we do the same.

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