The Darkest Night

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Text: Isaiah 53:3-5; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:43-44

# Intro

1. Recently, I saw a post from Crosswalk.com about *10 Christian Hymns That Need To Be Put To Rest* (by Jennifer Waddle, April 19, 2018), and the author’s main problem with her list of ten hymns was outdated language of older hymns.
2. “Night, With Ebon Pinion” didn’t end up on her list but it was suggested by some in the comments section of some of the shared postings I perused.
   1. <https://www.crosswalk.com/church/worship/10-christian-hymns-that-need-to-be-put-to-rest.html>
   2. Also, here: <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1002-song-police-the>
3. A preacher once asked, “What or who is Ebon Pinion, and how does it brood o’er the vale?”
   1. <https://www.armorofgodonline.com/media/sermons/2017/09/24/sing-with-the-understanding-night-with-ebon-pinion>
   2. Instead of ridding ourselves of hymns with words we don’t understand, let us strive to see the meaning and the picture they paint!
4. I Cor. 14:15: We must sing with understanding (“sing with the mind”).
5. *Night, With Ebon Pinion* by Love H. Jameson (1854)
   1. The lyrics were written by Love H. Jameson (1811-1892), a contemporary of Alexander Campbell during the Restoration Movement. It was first published in 1854, but the circumstances of its origin are unknown. Jameson also authored the well-known hymn, “There Is A Habitation.”
   2. The tune (Sorrows or Ebon Pinion) was composed by Joseph P. Powell (1830-1926). He was identified with Christian Churches, teaching vocal music after 1855. The date and circumstances of the tune’s composition are also unknown.
6. We often sing this during the Lord’s Supper and rightly so: it paints a vivid picture of the night Jesus was betrayed in the Garden before being handed over to die for the sins of the world.
   1. The Lord’s Supper is a memorial we partake of every first day of the week to remember Christ’s death and sacrifice till He comes again, as He directed (I Cor. 11:23-26).
   2. Knowledge of and personal application to His death makes us obedient to His word.
   3. Strengthens our resolve to live faithfully to Him and His will for our lives.
7. Jn. 3:16: God loved the world & He gave His only Son. The word “gave” encompasses so much:
   1. Betrayed by one of His own and delivered to the people seeking His life.
   2. Appeared before: Annas, Caiphas, Sanhedrin, Herod, & Pilate.
   3. He was scourged – often called, “The intermediate death.”
   4. Then to Calvary (Golgotha – Jn. 19:17) and crucifixion!
   5. Why? (Heb. 2:9: To “taste death for everyone.”)
8. The night Jesus was betrayed was humanity’s darkest night! *(Whether or not it was physically dark, it was morally dark with sin!)*

## Christ, the Man of Sorrows

1. Isaiah 53:3-5:
   1. “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”
   2. Jesus was about to suffer punishment even though He was sinless.
   3. He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. (Isaiah 53:5) For any man, even a man who was God…this would be something that weighted heavily upon His mind!
2. “Night, With Ebon Pinion, brooded o’er the vale”
   1. “Ebon” – this word refers to something that is black or very dark. The word ebony is a heavy, blackish wood from various tropical trees.
   2. “Pinion” – if you have an engineering background, you may be thinking of a type of gear, but this song is not about gears. Here it means wing feathers or wing.
      1. The pinion in this song is referring to the pinion joint in the wing of a bird.
      2. Pinion is the flight feather. Clip these and the bird can’t fly, thus no escape.
      3. Pinion as a metaphor: To bind, shackle, or confine, to prevent escape.
      4. The picture painted here is of a flock of black birds flying overhead, covering the one weeping in sorrow.
      5. “Ebon Pinion” could be a metaphor for “A night of dark confinement”
   3. “Brooded” – the verb form of the word brood, which is how it is used in this song, refers to the act of caring for or incubating.
      1. An example would be how a chicken sits on her eggs, or how a bird will cover her young with her wing.
      2. Has many meanings, but the thought here seems to be that dark night hovered closely over the place (which context suggests is the Garden of Gethsemane).
   4. The verse paints the picture of darkness and silence, except for the sound of the wind.
      1. In that lonely setting, Jesus, in profound sorrow, intensely prayed, completely overcome with emotion and exhaustion (“prostrate”).
      2. The song conveys the thought that this night was figuratively the darkest night, the night that death loomed for the sinless Son of God!
   5. *Night that was as dark as the wing of a black bird covered the Kidron Valley.*
   6. Mark 14:32-34: Jesus takes Peter, James, and John to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray.
   7. He said, “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death.”
3. “In tears and sweat as blood”
   1. Luke 22:43-44: Jesus prayed fervently; “being in agony He was praying very fervently.”
   2. (Note: Agony denotes, “severe emotional strain and anguish;” Vines)
   3. His sweat became like drops of blood (Not blood, but *as* blood; large sweat drops)
4. This picture in our minds of the place where our Lord spent His last few moments of freedom before His death ought to create within us a solemn mindset!
5. Christ, the Man of Sorrows, on that darkest night, bowed (prostrated) Himself humbly in prayer!
6. Jesus Prayed Alone
7. “All around was silent, Save the night-wind’s wail”
   1. Some have argued that since the Bible does not specifically say anything about a wind or silence, we should not sing it ([www.christiancourier.com/articles/1002-song-police-the](http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1002-song-police-the))
   2. However, some poetic license has been used. We can reasonably infer that since Jesus went late at night to a place which was quite apart from the normal avenues of human activity, undoubtedly so that He could concentrate in His prayer without distractions, it must have been fairly quiet.
   3. The Scriptures tell us He prayed alone! *(Mark 14:37-42)*
   4. Mark 14:37-42: Three times Jesus left His apostles to be by Himself. Luke records that He went a “stone’s throw” away (Luke 22:41).
   5. The apostles slept while Jesus wept and prayed (Heb. 5:7).
8. “He, for our transgressions, Had to weep alone; No friend with words to comfort, Nor hand to help was there”
   1. Jesus was suffering for offenses which were not His own, the just for the unjust (I Pet. 3:18).
   2. This suffering was so intense, in fact, that He was said to have been weeping as a result (Heb. 5:7).
   3. What made it even worse was that He had no human friend with words to comfort or hand to help, because even His closest disciples slept *(Mt.26:36-45; Mk. 14:37-42).*
9. At His darkest hour, when the future was certain, and only the worst was in the near future, Jesus didn’t just fret and worry Himself to death as we sometimes do, but he humbly bowed His head in prayer!
10. In our darkest of nights, with no human friends to comfort, we can turn to God in prayer!
11. Christ Accepted God’s Will
12. “Let this cup of anguish Pass from Me, I pray; Yet, if it must be suffered by Me, Thine only Son,   
    Abba, Father, Father, Let Thy will be done”
    1. Mk. 14:35-36: Jesus resigned Himself to God’s will (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8).
    2. He asked God if it was possible to not go through what was about to come, but if not possible, God’s will be done, not His own.
    3. Jesus accepted God’s answer, His will. We need to be able to accept His answer as well.
    4. Rom. 8:28: “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.”
    5. He referred to God as “Abba.” This is an Aramaic word for “father,” especially used as a term of endearment by a small child: “Daddy,” “Papa” (Mk. 14.36; Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4.6; I Jn. 3:1).
13. Heb. 12:1-3:
    1. Jesus looked beyond Gethsemane. What an important part of the story at Gethsemane!
    2. In Gethsemane we see Him in anguish, grieved to the point of death *(Mk. 14:34).*
    3. Here we see for the *“joy”* set before Him He endured the cross. Why?
    4. The Creator was so concerned about us (the created) He endured the cross so we might not lose heart and be comforted! *(I Pet. 5:6-7: He wants us to lay our cares upon Him!)*
14. Just as He was faithful to the Father in the face of the cross, so we too must be willing to pick up our cross and remain faithful to God in all circumstances!
15. This hymn serves as a powerful reminder of the faithfulness of Jesus, and how we can have that same faith, as well!
16. For our sins the sinless Lamb, out of love, died for you and for me!

## Conclusion

1. The hymn “Ebon Pinion” is a fitting song to prepare our minds for the Lord’s Supper.
   1. If we comprehend and contemplate its meaning, it can aid our mental preparation for the Lord’s Supper as well as remind us of God’s great love for each of us!.
2. There wasn’t only physical darkness that darkest night of Jesus’s betrayal, but also spiritual darkness in that it was the sins of the world that caused the spotless Son of God to suffer and die for us!
3. As we sing the words of this hymn…
   1. We should feel the darkness of the night and the chill of the wind as He was fervently praying without any earthly friend.
   2. We should feel sadness as we consider that He was receiving the wages of our sins, having no guilt of His own.
   3. We should see His ultimate example of submissive obedience, and we should be both awestruck and zealous to emulate His great example! (Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 5:8-9)
4. From the darkest night came the brightest day, when Jesus rose from the dead!
5. From His death & resurrection He sits at the right hand of God, exalted above every name *(Phil. 2:9)!*
6. He can turn your dark night into brightest day – He awaits to bring the faithful home!
7. Have you obeyed the gospel? Have you become a fellow heir of Heaven? *(Rom. 8:17)*
8. If not a Christian, you are subject to His judgment. Become a Christian! Jesus died to give you the opportunity to become a child of God (John 1:12). Repent & be baptized!
9. If a Christian with unrepented sin, you too are subject to the judgment seat of Christ. Repent!
10. Whatever your requests may be, let them be known ***NOW*** while we stand and sing!