

*Watchnight Hymns (1750)*¹

[Baker list, #188]

Editorial Introduction:

One of the distinctive practices that emerged in early Methodism was observing “watchnights.” These were nights when Methodists gathered to devote themselves to prayer, somber reflection, and mutual encouragement to the holy life. The practice was not a creation of the Wesley brothers. It appears to have been birthed among converted coal miners at Kingswood, likely as an alternative to previous attendance at revelries. The earliest mention we find of the practice in Charles Wesley’s *MS Journal* is when he attended a meeting at Kingswood on April 24, 1741. The following month John joined his brother at a night devoted to watching and prayer at Kingswood (see Charles’s *MS Journal* for May 22, 1741). Impressed by the benefits of the gathering for the miners, the Wesley brothers began recommending monthly celebrations throughout the Methodist connexion. Over time the pattern shifted to quarterly watchnights. Ultimately, watchnight service became a New Year’s Eve tradition which culminated in the typical joyous service early on New Year’s Day—cf. the introduction to *New Year’s Hymns* (1749).

Two hymns that Charles Wesley wrote in response to his initial experience of watchnight were published under the title of “Midnight Hymn” in *HSP* (1742), 131–34. These were soon sung regularly at watchnight services, encouraging Charles to write additional hymns. He collected nineteen of these additional hymns in *HSP* (1749), vol. 2. Then, in December 1750, Charles (or possibly John) had William Strahan print a pamphlet collection of *Hymns for the Watch-night* that contained eleven hymns selected from these earlier publications (original sources given in blue font in the Table of Contents below). This pamphlet was reprinted often to meet the need for this standard Methodist practice.

Editions:

[Charles Wesley.] *Hymns for the Watch-night*. [London: Strahan, 1750].

There were several other printings, most listing neither publisher or date.
No significant variant readings occur in these reprints.

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**HYMNS
FOR THE
WATCH-NIGHT.**

Hymn I.²

- [1] Oft have we pass'd the guilty night
 In revellings and frantick mirth:
The creature was our sole delight,
 Our happiness the things of earth;
But O! Suffice the season past,
We choose the better part at last.
- 2 We will not close our wakeful eyes,
 We will not let our eyelids sleep,
But humbly lift them to the skies,
 And all a solemn vigil keep:
So many years on sin bestow'd,
Can we not watch one night for God?
- 3 We can, dear Jesus, for thy sake,
 Devote our ev'ry hour to thee:
Speak but the word, our souls shall wake,
 And sing with chearful melody;
Thy praise shall our glad tongues employ,
And every heart shall dance for joy.
- 4 Dear object of our faith and love,
 We listen for thy welcome voice:
Our persons, and our works approve,
 And bid us in thy strength rejoice,
Now let us hear the midnight cry,
And shout to find the Bridegroom nigh.

²Appeared first in *HSP* (1742), 133–34 [text here follows 2nd edn. (1743)].

- 5 Shout in the midst of us, O King
Of saints, and make our joys abound;
Let us exult, give thanks, and sing,
And triumph in redemption found:
We ask for every waiting soul,
O let our glorious joy be full!
- 6 O may we all triumphant rise,
With joy upon our heads return,
And far above those nether skies,
By thee on eagle's wings upborn,
Thro' all yon radiant circles move,
And gain the highest heaven of love.

Hymn II.³

- [1] Thou judge of quick and dead,
Before whose bar severe,
With holy joy, or guilty dread,
We all shall soon appear:
Our caution'd souls prepare
For that tremendous day,
And fill us now with watchful care,
And stir us up to pray.
- 2 To pray, and wait the hour,
The awful hour unknown,
When robed in majesty and power,
Thou shalt from heaven come down;
Th' immortal Son of man,
To judge the human race,
With all thy Father's dazzling train,
With all thy glorious grace.
- 3 To damp our earthly joys,
T' increase our gracious fears,
For ever let th' archangel's voice
Be sounding in our ears,
The solemn midnight cry,
"Ye dead, the judge is come!
Arise, and meet him in the sky,
And meet your instant doom!"

³Appeared first in *HSP* (1749), 2:118–19.

4 O may we thus be found
Obedient to his word,
Attentive to the trumpet's sound,
And looking for our Lord!
O may we thus insure
Our lot among the blest,
And watch a moment to secure
An everlasting rest.

Hymn III.⁴

[1] O Jesus, the rest
Of spirits distressed,
In whom all the children of men *may* be blest;
The blessing design'd
For the whole of mankind,
Give us in the love of thy Spirit to find.

2 For this do we keep
A sad vigil, and weep,
The fruit of our tears that in joy we may reap;
While sent from above
The comfort we prove,
The unspeakable gift of thy ransoming love.

3 Our brethren we see
By mercy set free,
They have found the abundant redemption in thee;
Thy tenders of grace
They gladly embrace,
And tell of thy goodness, and live to thy praise.

4 But still we remain
In bondage and pain,
Unable to bear, or to shake off our chain;
In the furnace we cry,
Come, Lord, from the sky,
Make hast to our help, or in Egypt we die.

5 O Jesus, appear,
Thy mourners to cheer,
Our grief to assuage, and to banish our fear:

⁴Appeared first in *HSP* (1749), 2:123–24.

Thy prisoners release,
Vouchsafe us thy peace,
And our troubles and sins in a moment shall cease.

6 That moment be now:
The petition allow,
Our present Redeemer, and Comforter thou!
The freedom from sin,
The atonement bring in,
And sprinkle our conscience, and bid us be clean.

7 The blessing of grace,
Now let it take place,
The dew of thy mercy descend on our race;
Thy Spirit, O God,
Pour out on the crowd,
And water us all with a shower of thy blood.

Hymn IV.⁵

[1] I, I am the man that have known
Distress by the stroke of his rod;
And still thro' the anguish I groan,
And pine for the absence of God:
The happy in Jesus may sleep;
But O! Till in me he appears,
Be this my employment to weep,
And water my couch with my tears.

2 Or rather, if any are nigh,
Forlorn and afflicted like me,
All night let us lift up our cry,
And mourn his appearing to see:
(As watchmen expecting the morn)
Look out for the light of his face,
And wait for his mercy's return,
And long to recover his grace.

3 His grace to our souls *did* appear,
And brought us salvation from sin;
We felt our Immanuel here,
Restoring his kingdom within:

⁵Appeared first in *HSP* (1749), 2:122–23.

But O! We have lost him again,
His Spirit hath taken its flight;
Our joy it is turn'd into pain,
Our day it is turn'd into night.

- 4 O what shall we do to retrieve
The love for a season bestow'd!
'Tis better to die than to live
Exil'd from the presence of God:
With sorrow distracted and doubt,
With palpable horror opprest,
The city we wander about,
And seek our repose in his breast.
- 5 Ye watchmen of Israel, declare
If ye our beloved have seen,
And point to that heavenly fair,
Surpassing the children of men:
Our Lover and Lord from above,
Who only can quiet our pain,
Whom only we languish to love,
O where shall we find him again!
- 6 The joy, and desire of our eyes,
The end of our sorrow and woe,
Our hope, and our heavenly prize,
Our height of ambition below;
Once more, if he shew us his face,
He never again shall depart,
Detain'd in our closest embrace,
Eternally held in our heart.

Hymn V.⁶

- [1] Jesus, God of our salvation,
Give us eyes thyself to see,
Waiting for thy consolation,
Longing to believe on thee:
Now vouchsafe the sacred power,
Now the faith divine impart;
Meet us at this solemn hour,
Shine in every drooping heart.

⁶Appeared first in *HSP* (1749), 2:132–33.

- 2 Anna-like within the temple,
Simeon-like we meekly stay,
Daily with thy saints assemble,
Nightly for thy coming pray:
While our souls are bow'd before thee,
While we humbly sue for grace,
Come, thy people's light and glory,
Shew to all thy heavenly face.
- 3 If to us thy sacred Spirit
Hath the future grace reveal'd,
Let us by thy righteous merit
Now receive our pardon seal'd:
To eternal life appointed,
Let us thy salvation see,
Now behold the Lord's anointed,
Now obtain our heaven in thee.

Hymn VI.⁷

- [1] Jesus, guard thy gather'd sheep,
Who thy voice begin to know,
Day and night in safety keep,
Help us after thee to go:
Eying thee with fixt regard,
By thy word and Spirit led,
Walk we in the works prepar'd,
Close in all thy footsteps tread.
- 2 In thy pilgrimage with men,
(Objects of thy constant care)
Thou didst all their griefs sustain,
Lab'ring, watching unto prayer:
Thou whole nights in prayer didst spend,
On the mount for us employ'd,
Prompt the helpless to defend,
Prevalent with man and God.
- 3 By no private wants compel'd,
Only love inspir'd thy breast,
Love thy steady hands upheld,
Love inforc'd the kind request:

⁷Appeared first in *HSP* (1749), 2:133–34.

And shall we refuse to join,
We who all the good receive,
Reap the fruit of toil divine,
By the prayer of Jesus live.

4 Nay, but in thy strength we rise,
Nightly to the mountain go,
Breathe our wishes to the skies
For the sleeping crowd below:
Pray, my watchful brethren, pray,
Full of wants, and sins, and fears,
Wrestle 'till the break of day,
'Till the saving grace appears.

5 Jesus, hear our midnight cry,
Execute thy love's design;
Bring thy great salvation nigh,
Claim a ransom'd world for thine:
Take the purchase of thy blood,
(Blood that speaks our sins forgiven;)
Let it bring us near to God,
Let it pray us up to heav'n!

Hymn VII.⁸

[1] How happy, gracious Lord, are we,
Divinely drawn to follow thee,
Whose hours divided are
Betwixt the mount and multitude;
Our day is spent in doing good,
Our night in praise and prayer.

2 With us no melancholy void,
No moments linger unemploy'd,
Or unimprov'd below;
Our weariness of life is gone,
Who live to serve our God alone,
And only thee to know.

3⁹ The winter's night, and summer's day
Glides imperceptibly away,
Too short to sing thy praise;
Too few we find the happy hours,
And haste to join those heavenly powers,
In everlasting lays.

⁸Appeared first in *HSP* (1749), 2:136.

⁹Ori., "4".

- 4 With all who chaunt thy name on high,
And holy, holy, holy cry,
 A bright harmonious throng,
We long thy praises to repeat,
And restless sing around thy seat
 The new eternal song.

Hymn VIII.¹⁰

- [1] Meet and right it is to sing,
 At every time and place,
Glory to our heavenly King,
 The God of truth and grace:
Join we then with sweet accord,
 All in one thanksgiving join,
Holy, holy, holy Lord,
 Eternal praise be thine!
- 2 Thee the first-born sons of light
 In choral symphonies,
Praise by day (day without night)
 And never, never cease:
Angels, and archangels all,
 Sing the mystic Three in One;
Sing, and stop, and gaze and fall
 O'erwhelm'd before thy throne.
- 3 Vying with that happy quire
 Who chaunt thy praise above,
We on eagles' wings aspire,
 The wings of faith and love:
Thee they sing with glory crown'd,
 We extol the slaughter'd Lamb;
Lower if our voices sound,
 Our subject is the same.
- 4 Father, God, thy love we praise,
 Which gave thy Son to die;
Jesus, full of truth and grace,
 Alike we glorify.
Spirit, Comforter divine,
 Praise by all to thee be given,
'Till we in full chorus join,
 And earth is turn'd to heaven.

¹⁰Appeared first in *HSP* (1749), 2:136–37.

Hymn IX.¹¹

- [1] Come, let us anew
 Our pleasures pursue;
 For Christian delight
The day is too short; let us borrow the night:
 In sanctify'd joy
 Each moment employ
 To Jesus's praise,
And spend, and be spent in the triumph of grace.
- 2 The slaves of excess,
 Their senses to please,
 Whole nights can bestow,
And on in a circle of riot they go:
 Poor prodigals, they
 The night into day
 By revellings turn,
And all the restraints of sobriety scorn.
- 3 The drunkards proclaim
 At midnight their shame,
 Their sacrifice bring,
And loud to the praise of *their* master they sing:
 The hellish desires
 Which Satan inspires,
 In sonnets they breathe,
And shouting descend to the regions of death.
- 4 The civiller crowd
 In theatres proud
 Acknowledge his power,
And Satan in nightly *assemblies* adore:
 To the masque and the ball
 They fly at his call;
 Or in pleasures excel,
And chant in a grove* to the harpers of hell.
- 5 And shall *we* not sing
 Our Master and King,
 While men are at rest,
With Jesus admitted at midnight to feast!

* Ranelagh's Gardens, Vaux-Hall, &c.

¹¹Appeared first in *HSP* (1749), 2:140–41.

Here only we may
With innocence stay,
Th' enjoyment improve,
And abide at the banquet of Jesus's love.

6 In him is bestow'd
The spiritual food,
The manna divine,
And Jesus's love is far better than wine:
With joy we receive
The blessing, and give
By day and by night,
All thanks to the source of our endless delight.

7 Our concert of praise
To Jesus we raise,
And all the night long
Continue the new evangelical song:
We dance to the fame
Of Jesus's name;
The joy it imparts
Is heaven begun in our musical hearts.

8 Thus, thus we bestow
Our moments below,
And singing remove,
With all the redeem'd to the Sion above:
There, there we shall stand
With our harps in our hand,
Interrupted no more,
And eternally sing, and rejoice, and adore.

Hymn X.¹²

[1] Ye virgin souls arise,
With all the dead awake,
Unto salvation wise,
Oil in your vessels take;
Upstarting at the midnight cry,
Behold the heavenly Bridegroom nigh.

¹²Appeared first in *HSP* (1749), 2:142–43.

- 2 He comes, he comes to call
The nations to his bar,
And raise to glory all
Who fit for glory are:
Made ready for your full reward,
Go forth with joy to meet your Lord.
- 3 Go meet him in the sky,
Your everlasting friend,
Your head to glorify,
With all his saints ascend;
Ye pure in heart, obtain the grace
To see without a veil his face.
- 4 Ye that have here receiv'd
The unction from above,
And in his Spirit liv'd
Obedient to his love,
Jesus shall claim you for his bride;
Rejoice with all the sanctified.
- 5 Rejoice in glorious hope
Of that great day unknown,
When all shall be caught up
And stand before his throne;
Call'd to partake the marriage-feast,
And lean on our Emmanuel's breast.
- 6 The everlasting doors
Shall soon the saints receive,
Above those angel-powers
In glorious joy to live,
Far from a world of grief and sin,
With God eternally shut in.
- 7 Then let us wait to hear
The trumpet's welcome sound;
To see our Lord appear,
Watching let us be found,
When Jesus doth the heavens bow,
Be found—as, Lord, thou find'st us now!

Hymn XI.¹³

- [1] Join all ye ransom'd sons of grace,
The holy joy prolong,
And shout to the Redeemer's praise
A solemn midnight song.
- 2 Blessing, and thanks, and love, and might
Be to our Jesus given,
Who turns our darkness into light,
Who turns our hell to heaven.
- 3 Thither our faithful souls he leads,
Thither he bids us rise,
With crowns of joy upon our heads,
To meet him in the skies.
- 4 To seal the universal doom
The skies he soon shall bow:
But if thou must at midnight come,
O let us meet thee now.

¹³Appeared first in *HSP* (1749), 2:138.