**FAVORITE HYMNS**

***Abide With Me***

If someone were to ask me, “Rick, if you were lying on your death bed, what scripture would you want read to you, and what hymn would you want sung to you?” – what would I answer?

There are many choices I can think of in answer to what scripture I would want to hear before departing this world. I have many “favorites” that would bring me comfort in such a moment as that. Some that come to mind are passages like the great resurrection chapter of I Corinthians 15. Or perhaps the stirring section from I Thessalonians 4:13-18 through 5:1-10 (both sections ending with “… *comfort one another with these words*” and “*therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing*”). One other that I would love to hear is Philippians 3:20-21,

*“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”*

But when it comes to my hymn of choice as I prepare to meet my Maker, I have a special one I think about: *Abide With Me*.

Perhaps we have all heard the phrase, “the performer’s Swan Song,” inferring it is his last performance before retirement or death. Such might be said of Henry Lyte’s last known written poem. He lived in a fishing village near Devonshire England, ministering to that church for 24 years. His lungs were deteriorating quickly so he made plans to take a vacation to southern France in hopes of restoring his health. As he was about to leave he took a stroll along the beautiful ocean shore of his 41 acre estate, then went to his room for about an hour to write before leaving his family. When he came out he had a copy of a poem he had written. The year was 1847.

On that journey, while in Nice, France, it was discovered that his lung condition was actually tuberculosis. He died without ever seeing his family again. There is dispute whether he actually wrote this song, *Abide With Me*, in that hour of solitude before leaving home, but it became known for its beauty of a dying man’s thoughts before breathing his last breath. We do know this for certain, in the past 160 years it has become the most requested song at funerals.

But it would have been unknown to us without the melody giving it life. Fourteen years after Lyte’s death this poem came to the desk of William Monk, a music writer. He immediately was moved by the words and it is said that within the hour had written the tune that made it famous. He titled the melody “Eventide” based on a line in the poem. It has since that year of 1861 been included in every hymnal ever published in the English language. It became immensely popular with British soldiers in World War 1 who were facing death in the trenches of France. Many funerals of these soldiers would hear John McCrae’s famous poem *In Flanders Fields*, which he wrote at the death of one of his friends, and it would be followed by the singing of *Abide With Me*.

The hymn is based on Luke 24:29 where Jesus was walking with the two men on the day of His resurrection. When they reached their home in Emmaus they begged this “stranger” to please stay with them. Their words were: “*But they constrained him, saying, ‘Abide with us, for it is toward evening and the day is far spent*.’” Mr. Lyte took that phrase “abide with us” and made it personal by changing it to “me.” He then took the concept of evening, and the day being spent, and referenced it as the passing of our life. The line “in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me,” touches the heartstrings like no other hymn as we lay our loved ones to rest.

The fear of death has gripped us all. With the non-stop news stories bombarding us with this viral disease, of violence by mobs burning, looting and shooting, by wars and rumors of wars, by hearing of our own loved ones facing life’s end, we cannot but help looking soberly at our own mortality. We are reminded, “*It is appointed unto man once to die*” (Heb. 9:27). But to the faithful Christian the thought of death is revealed as but a “*sleep in Jesus*” (I Thess. 4:14). It is a transition, a metamorphosis, from this “*walk through the valley of the shadow of death*” (Psa. 23:4) to where we “*obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him”* (I Thess. 5:9-10).

Are you afraid of death? Then take a moment and read Hebrews 2:14-18.

Then sing this inspiring hymn with me.

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide. The darkness deepens, Lord, with me abide;
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me!

Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day; Earth’s joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see, O Thou who changes not, abide with me!

I need Thy presence every passing hour; What but Thy grace can foil the tempter’s pow’r?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be? Thru cloud and sunshine, O abide with me!

I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless; Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
Where is death’s sting? Where, grave, thy victory? I triumph still if Thou abide with me!

Hold Thou thy cross before my closing eyes; Shine thru the gloom, and point me to the skies;
Heav’n’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee; In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!

When darkness deepens and life’s little day swiftly closes around me, I will feel comfort knowing that it is but a going to sleep. When the joys of youth have faded and the striving for life’s glories have proven elusive (Eccl. 11:9-12:8), I feel comfort that the unchanging hand of God abides with me. When I close my eyes for the last time, with Christ’s cross and God’s grace as my vision, I know that in just mere moments the angels that carried Lazarus to his reward will carry me to mine. I too, like the great cloud of witnesses who made this journey before me, will shout to the grave and to death “Where is your sting? Where is your victory?” Jesus, who abode with me in life, will abide with me in death! The sunset on earth breaks forth into heaven’s morning! O Lord, come!

*If* I die (the Lord may come first), and *if* I have a funeral, and *if* this hymn is sung (those two items are out of my control), my hope and prayer is that it will not just be a sentimental moment that brings a tear, but a reality check, first about my life (after all, it’s my funeral, right?), but then about yours (my fate will be sealed, yours is not).

Until next week (Lord willing) … abide with Jesus now, so He will abide with you then.

I love you. Rick