

Just As I Am

The song "Just As I Am" has caused me, and many of my brethren, concern from time to time. Its message is straightforward. Jesus loves me and wants me to come to Him in whatever walk of life I may be at the time. It carries a lovely message, but we are concerned about how the song has been used by the world, especially the denominational world. This song is a call to come, follow Jesus, and learn about Him and His Gospel. However, to many people, it carries the impression that a person does not have to change from being like the world to being acceptable to Jesus.

"Just As I Am" is number 813 in our current songbooks. It is a well-known hymn written by Charlotte Elliott in 1835. It first appeared in the *Christian Remembrancer*, of which Elliott became the editor in 1836. The song encouraged Billy Graham to "come to Jesus" in 1934, and subsequently, he used "Just As I Am" as the altar call in his crusades for the rest of his life. Graham taught people to take Jesus into their hearts and pray, expressing that they accepted Him as their savior. He also taught that it did not matter which church or faith you attended but that you should be with some group that believed in Jesus. Thousands answered this call without being taught the whole Gospel of Christ and did not know about repentance and the need for baptism. Never mentioned were (Matthew .28:18-20); (John 3:5); and (Acts 2:38) except to indicate that you can be baptized if you want to, but it is not necessary. Graham and his followers missed the point that the call to come to Jesus "as you are" is to come, learn, and change; *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. **Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls**"* (Matthew 11:28-29).

In addition to the song's words, the Scriptures reflect the changes brought about in the servants of God by following His messengers, the last of whom is Jesus, His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). Noah found grace from God because he was not engaged in the activities of the world about him. Abraham was called out of the idol-infested countries of his birth and family so that he would not become entangled with the idolaters, and Israel was called out of Egypt to be a unique, God-fearing people. Solomon referred to the call of Israel as he dedicated the Temple. Praying to God, he recalled, *"For You separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be Your inheritance, as You spoke by Your servant Moses, when You brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord GOD"* (1 Kings 8:53). And Paul refers to those called to follow Christ, to be a separate and holy people, as he writes to the Corinthians. "Therefore, **come out from their midst and be separate,**" says the Lord. **"and do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you"** (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). Notice that Jesus' welcome is conditional, welcoming those that are separate and obey Him. There is much to say about this world's temporary pleasures that must be given up to follow Christ. But for now, we note that those who follow Jesus must be different from the world. At first, it may seem like a paradox.

Jesus' words, recorded only by Matthew, seem to have special meaning to those that labored and waited for the promised Messiah. *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. **Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light**"* (Matthew 11:28-30). Many who hear Jesus' call only hear the "resting" part of the call. Ready to be unburdened by the labors and cares of daily life and looking for rest causes us to miss the new yoke we must pick up.

First, the "rest" in verse 29 is like a vacation where we enjoy the change but may wear ourselves out in the new activities. The new activities are not a "do-nothing" rest but a change that brings about a

"refreshing" of both body and spirit. Earthly vacations renew our vigor and enthusiasm, if not our age, and helps to restore health and ambition. The rest Jesus offers is a change of desires, motivation, and lifestyle that renews our spirit. In verse 24, Matthew records Jesus saying, *"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me"* (Matthew 16:24). This statement makes the "Yolk" seem like another heavy burden. Coming to Him involves denying self to yield to His control so that self has no rights. Taking up the cross means to endure shame, suffering, and perhaps martyrdom for His sake; to die to sin, self, and the world. Following Him means to live as He lived with humility, compassion, love, grace, and every other godly virtue; And if necessary, poverty.

Are you on the journey to eternal life?