

My Savior First of All—February’s Hymn of the Month 2020

By

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Jamestown, New York, is in the western part of the state, and northwest of the town is Lake Chautauqua. Back in 1874, a Methodist camp meeting was founded there by John Vincent and Lewis Miller, the father-in-law to Thomas Edison. Mrs. Mina Edison was very active in the Methodist church. Her charity work is still remembered by friends and family in Fort Myers, Florida, which was the summer home of Thomas and his wife. A grand hotel, the Athenaeum, was built on the Lake Chautauqua grounds. We had the opportunity to visit the hotel back in 1995. It would be on the front porch of the Athenaeum that the inspiration for the writing of a hymn would take place.

The composer, John R. Sweney, and the blind writer, Fanny J. Crosby, were seated on this porch enjoying a beautiful summer’s evening when John posed a question to Fanny. He asked, “Fanny, do you think we’ll recognize our friends in Heaven?” Fanny replied, “Yes, I think we will; but what you really want to know is how will a blind, old lady recognize anyone, especially, Jesus. Well, I don’t think I’ll have any problem; but if I do, I’m going to look for the one I feel might be my Lord. Then, I’ll ask him if I may see his hands. When I see the nail prints, then, I will know I’ve met my Savior.” John responded, “That could be the basis for a hymn.” Fanny replied, “I suppose it could, but I’m tired. I’m going to bed.”

The next morning, Fanny would give John the words that the Lord gave her before retiring that evening. A hymn was born that day at Lake Chautauqua that has lasted through the years. The hymn, *My Savior First of All*, was put in print in 1894 and became part of the list of over 8,000 hymns that Fanny Crosby would write in her 95 years of life here on earth. This hymn reminds us of the sacrificial death of Jesus to pay the penalty for our sins and the real meaning of Easter.

It’s been said that the only man-made thing in Heaven is the prints in Jesus’ hands (wrists). Though man intended the cross for evil purposes, God overruled and provided the way to Heaven by Christ’s victory over death. You can share in that victory by repentance and acceptance of the gift of Heaven which Christ provided that first Easter. Make *My Savior First of All* a truth for you, too!

When my life work is ended, and I cross the swelling tide,
When the bright and glorious morning I shall see;
I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other side,
and His smile will be the first to welcome me.

Oh, the soul-thrilling rapture when I view His blessed face,
And the luster of His kindly beaming eye;
How my full heart will praise Him for the mercy, love, and grace
That prepared for me a mansion in the sky.

Oh, the dear ones in glory, how they beckon me to come,
And our parting at the river I recall;
To the sweet vales of Eden they will sing my welcome home,
But I long to meet my Savior first of all.

Thro' the gates to the city in a robe of spotless white, He will
lead me where no tears will ever fall; In the glad song of ages I shall
mingle with delight, But I long to meet my Savior first of all.

Chorus

I shall know Him, I shall know Him, and Redeemed by His side I shall stand;
I shall know Him, I shall know Him By the print of the nails in His hand.

As we continue this year to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Fanny's birthday, I had to share this song in particular. The hymn expresses so well the life of this blind hymn writer because we see that she was looking forward to the day when she could see. Asked one time if she regretted not being able to see, she responded by saying, "No, because the first face I shall see is the face of Jesus." Fanny truly loved the Lord. "His smile will be the first to welcome me."