

Proper 10 (Series B)

“Jesus, Priceless Treasure” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #743)

Biblically informed individuals are quite aware that since The Fall hardships, temporal and spiritual temptations, and trials are weighty challenges that will confront them throughout their life. Believers and unbelievers alike, no one escapes them!

Johann Franck (1618-1677), who penned “*Jesus, Priceless Treasure*”, knew of many difficult hardships. In fact, he chronicles a variety of them in this hymn, e.g. “storms”, “empty glory”, Satan’s tempting, and others. How he confronts them—in some instances quite defiantly, can provide encouragement to the reader/singer. Clearly reflected is a confident Biblical faith that enables this positive confrontation.

Realizing Franck was born the same year the 30 Years War commenced, and living several decades thereafter, he would have known from firsthand experiences and observation about dealing with various kinds of deprivation, unnatural loss of lives, property and possessions, and premature death for many.

Yet, what shines through in this hymn is the stalwart assurance he finds in the “Priceless Treasure”. Boldly, even exuberantly, Franck’s words can help us confidently sing of where true, enduring safety, peace, and “purest Pleasure” are to be found.

Several complementary components contribute to the widespread appeal of this hymn in America. Deserving particular recognition are the buoyant chorale tune “*Jesu, meine Freude*” and the splendid English translation that are commonly partners when it is sung. Separated from these, it is hard to imagine this poem having its breadth of recognition and being included in multiple Christian hymnals in this century.

Some of its textual richness can be further appreciated by focusing on various expressive adjectives, verbs, and salient nouns, each of which assists in illuminating a bit more brightly and clearly a life that has its abiding trust in Jesus, the priceless Treasure.

As an avenue for initiating a devotional encounter with some of these enriching words, begin in stanza one with the first adjective: “priceless”. What or how does it offer potential for further and richer appreciation of its partner noun “Treasure”? Consider, then, reflecting on the other adjectives, verbs, and nouns in the stanza.

Allowing particular words sufficient time to stimulate and unveil additional meaning could be blessed by taking a few devotional minutes each day during the week to focus on just a single stanza: stanza one on Monday; stanza two on Tuesday; etc., finishing on Saturday with stanza six, culminating then with the singing the complete hymn on Sunday.

For starters, try reflecting on these from stanza one:

—with each, allow a little time for a thought or two to develop—

- “priceless”* . . . a value that is beyond a monetary consideration . . .
- “treasure” . . . for a young child it may be a cozy blanket, or a cuddly fuzzy toy.
 - What do youths, many adults, or do I, personally, hold in very, very high esteem?
- “truest” . . . in what sense?
- “yearning” . . . how?; why?
- “suffer” . . . what does it mean here?
 - * *If using a different English translation, consider doing the same with those enriching words.*

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A prospect for devotional listening and meditation: Bach’s motet “Jesu, meine Freude”

At the time I perused prospects on the Internet, I was unable to locate a quality You Tube or other playable choral recording of the entire motet in English, though there are (were) several fine ones in German. More readily accessible are recordings that offer a Bach harmonization of select stanzas. Especially for meditative listening, Kings College, Cambridge, England, (Sir David Willcocks directing), is a quality choral treatment of stanza one. It is sung more expansively, which, for devotional listening, can aid one’s focus on the content.

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Jesus, priceless treasure, fount of purest pleasure,
truest friend to me,
ah, how long in anguish shall my spirit languish,
yearning, Lord, for thee?
Thou art mine, O Lamb divine!
I will suffer naught to hide thee;
naught I ask beside thee.

In thine arms I rest me; foes who would molest me
cannot reach me here.
Though the earth be shaking, ev’ry heart be quaking,
Jesus calms my fear.
Lightnings flash and thunders crash;
Yet, though sin and hell assail me,
Jesus will not fail me.

Satan, I defy thee; death, I now decry thee;
fear, I bid thee cease.
World, thou shalt not harm me nor thy threats alarm me
while I sing of peace.
God's great pow'r guard ev'ry hour;
Earth and all its depths adore him,
Silent bow before him.

Hence, all earthly treasure! Jesus is my pleasure,
Jesus is my choice.
Hence, all empty glory! Naught to me thy story
told with tempting voice.
Pain or loss, or shame or cross,
shall not from my Savior move me
since he deigns to love me.

Evil world, I leave thee; thou canst not deceive me,
thine appeal is vain.
Sin that once did blind me, get thee far behind me,
come not forth again.
Past thy hour, O pride and pow'r;
sinful life, thy bonds I sever,
Leave thee now forever.

Hence, all fear and sadness! For the Lord of gladness,
Jesus enters in.
Those who love the Father, though the storms may gather,
still have peace within.
Yea, whate'er I here must bear,
thou art still my purest please,
Jesus, priceless treasure!

Text: Johann Franck; English translation by Catherine Winkworth. Public domain.

[This devotion has been prepared for the website of the Center for Church Music. It may be downloaded and duplicated for local use.]