

I Know That My Redeemer Lives

April 2012 - Hymn of the Month



This testimonial hymn has expressed the essence of Christianity for over 200 years. Written in 1775, the timeless lyrics by Samuel Medley were first printed in a leaflet or in a magazine and have been set to several different melodies. It is instructive that this hymn was written by a man who would have seemed an unlikely candidate for such work based on his early years.

The hymn has great power to bless and uplift. Edward P. Kimball, composer and Tabernacle organist, wrote: "When doubt, discouragement, or any foe of the spirit of God manifests itself, pray and then sing or even play this truly inspired song and a new light to cheer and bless will kindle your soul... The style of this song is necessarily grand through its simplicity, but it takes a cultivated mind to appreciate the beauty of sheer simplicity, and of course the best type of worship is truly simple; hence this song, recognizing the sublime truth of the Redeemer's mission, is one of the most impressive hymns in our possession."

It is said that Samuel Medley wrote 230 hymns, many of which were particularly popular in his own denomination and the more Calvinistic churches. Several are still in use today. His hymns were noted for their warmth and occasional pathos, and the use of repeated words and refrains. "I

Know That My Redeemer Lives," is one of the best known.



SAMUEL MEDLEY

Samuel Medley was born in 1738 in Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, England. His father was a schoolteacher and is said to have been a friend of the scientist, Sir Isaac Newton. Samuel received a good education at his father's school, and then at fourteen was apprenticed to an oilman in London. He disliked the work and escaped his agreement by enlisting in the navy. He was made a midshipman in the Royal Navy in 1755. Samuel was transferred to the "Intrepid" under Admiral Boscawen during the Seven Years' War. In 1759 he fought in the battle of Cape Lagos against the French, where he was severely wounded in the leg. Although he had led a profligate life, when told by the surgeon that amputation would be the only way to save his life, he earnestly prayed, and the next morning the surgeon was amazed at his improvement and is reported to have said, "This is little short of a miracle."

This miracle did not induce him to change his ways immediately, however. He left the navy to recuperate and went to live with his grandfather, Mr. Tonge, who was a pious man. His grandfather sought to lead him into a better way of life. One evening Samuel's grandfather read to him a sermon by Pastor Isaac Watts on Isaiah 42:6-7, which opened his eyes and touched his heart. He was converted to Christianity and after his recovery joined the Baptist Church in Eagle Street, London, then under Dr.

Andrew Gifford. Dr. Gifford later encouraged him to enter the Baptist ministry. Samuel opened a school which he conducted with success for several years until he received a call in 1767 to become pastor at the Baptist Church in Watford, Hertfordshire. From there, in 1772 he began a ministry at Byrom Street in Liverpool where he gathered a large congregation and served for 27 years. It is said that he took a real interest in the souls of seamen and tailored his preaching to them. It is interesting to note that this ministry took place during the American Revolutionary War.

After a long and painful illness Samuel died in Liverpool in 1799. While near his death, he is reported to have said, "Dying is sweet work, sweet work! My Heavenly Father! I am looking up to my dear Jesus, My God, my portion, my all in all!"

It is meaningful that the man whose sermon was instrumental in Samuel Medley's conversion to Christianity, Isaac Watts, is considered by many to be the Father of English Hymnology. Three of Isaac Watt's hymns were included in the first LDS hymnbook, 1835, one of which was the Christmas favorite, "Joy to the World." Ten of his hymns are included in the LDS hymnbook, 1985 edition. Of these, "Sweet is the Work," may have been familiar to Samuel Medley as he used a similar phrase in his dying words. One can speculate that the hymnody of Isaac Watts was an influence on Samuel Medley and his writing of "I Know That My Redeemer Lives." This is a great encouragement to expression.

"I Know That My Redeemer Lives" was also included by Emma Smith in the first LDS hymnbook, 1835, although in a different format with seven short verses. In 1901, a version with a melody by Lewis D. Edwards was published which combined the short verses into longer ones. The odd number of verses necessitated the repetition of the last verse, which fit well with the overall repetitive pattern of the hymn. Other notable LDS composers had previously written music for the hymn, but the Welshman Edwards' version had the

right touch and has remained to this day in the LDS hymnal. George D. Pyper said, "Edwards caught Medley's style by giving accent to the key words which the hymnist loved to repeat in his refrains..."

Lewis D. Edwards was born in Aberdare, South Wales in 1858. Immigrating to America, he spent some of his youth in Pennsylvania, singing in Church choirs. Traveling west he was converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, baptized at Ogden, Utah, and moved to Willard, Utah. There Lewis met the Latter-day Saint composer and hymnist Evan Stephens who became his teacher and life-long friend. Under the tuition of Evan Stephens he learned to play the organ and progressed rapidly in the study of harmony and composition.

Lewis became a bandmaster, choir director and music teacher composing many songs for children and Sunday school. He wrote and produced an opera and won prizes for his anthems. One of his anthems, "Our Father in Heaven," was sung daily at the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple. Referred to as a professor, he was a teacher of music in Ogden City schools, conducted choirs in Logan, conducted singing classes in surrounding communities, and moving to Preston, Idaho in 1891, taught at the Oneida Stake Academy, where his choir won competition prizes. He was also director of music in the Salt Lake City schools for a short time.

Professor Edwards passed away at LaGrande, Oregon in 1921, leaving behind an enduring record of his spirit and talent in the music for "I Know That My Redeemer Lives."

"I know that my Redeemer lives.
What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was dead.
He lives, my ever-living head.

He lives to bless me with his love.
He lives to plead for me above.
He lives my hungry soul to feed.
He lives to bless in time of need.

He lives to grant me rich supply.
He lives to guide me with his eye.
He lives, to comfort me when faint.
He lives to hear my soul's complaint.

He lives to silence all my fears.
He lives to wipe away my tears.
He lives to calm my troubled heart.
He lives all blessings to impart.

He lives, my kind, wise heavenly Friend.
He lives and loves me to the end.
He lives, and while he lives, I'll sing.
He lives, my prophet, Priest, and King.

He lives and grants me daily breath.
He lives, and I shall conquer death.
He lives my mansion to prepare.
He lives to bring me safely there.

He lives! All glory to his name!
He lives, my Savior still the same.
Oh, sweet the joy this sentence gives:
"I know that my Redeemer lives!"



Information in this article came from:

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