

Poetry of Barry Johnson - Page Three



IS THE SUN SHINING, LORD

Is the sun shining, Lord? Is the dark water flowing?

Are trees and grass in the rainwater growing?

Lord, Adonai, why are the birds singing?

Why are they nesting and mating and winging?

Do You tell your creatures what to do next,

In a world you made beautifully complex?

Is the sun shining, Lord? Does the stream water rise?

Was it You Who brought the rain down from the skies?

Jehovah-Jireh, do You provide?

Why does Your rain on a thunderstorm ride?

Why, El Shaddai, living world that I see:

Why was it given to a sinner like me?

Is the sun shining, Lord? Is the rushing stream heard?

Did the world's ecosystem begin at Your word?

Why is the rainbow high in the sky,

Made of water and light? Would You tell me why?

Elohim, Creator, Living God, can I see,

The promise You made in the sky above me?

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Common Idolatries

PROLOGUE

To all of those who ever chose,

An idol o'er God's Son.

I guess that must be all of us:

Every single one!

THE SINGER

The heart and soul of rock and roll
is in that driving beat.

I took my stand beside the band
and made my music sweet.

And then I bowed before the crowd
and savored all my fame.

Ovations rang each time I sang;
they shouted out my name.

The music made my listeners shout
or drove them to their knees.

But then I heard the Lord say,
"Do you love Me more than these?"

THE LOVER

In all the world there was one girl,
who set my heart aflame.

Her little sighs and deep blue eyes;
I even loved her name.

It meant so much to feel her touch,
and look into her eyes.

Her softest kiss like morning mist,
would make my heartbeat rise.

I was so in love that I'd do,
anything to please.

But then I heard the Lord say,
"Do you love Me more than these?"

THE SOCIAL DRINKER

I'd drive my car down to the bar,
and sit with all my friends.

Long we'd drink and glasses clink;
The party never ends.

A long hard day would fade away
in the pub's dim light.

I'd park my mind somewhere behind

and drink away the night.

And when I stumbled to my car,
and fumbled for my keys,
I think I heard the Lord say,
"Do you love Me more than these?"

THE EXECUTIVE

At the top, you never stop;
you can't afford the loss.
When I say "Jump!" my people hump;
they all know who's the boss.

I hope you know, as CEO
That it's my job to win.
At every step my hard work kept,
the profits rolling in.

But as I read the P & L
made by my expertise,

one day I heard the Lord say,
"Do you love Me more than these?"

THE CLUB MEMBER

The second floor, inside the door,
a pretty woman stood.

Satin tights reflect the lights,
and high heel shoes look good.

Long dark hair and shoulders bare,
expertly painted eyes.

Long legs posed as silken hose,
encased her silken thighs.

She smiled and greeted all the men,
and checked the members' keys.

Then like a shock the Lord said,
"Do you love Me more than these?"

THE DRIVER

It never swerved on any curve,
it handled like a dream.

The tach would wind right to the line;
I made the engine scream.

A Porsche, they say, is built that way;
an awesome car to drive.

I punched the gas; man, what a blast!
It almost seemed alive.

And when my speed was such that it
had blurred the passing trees;
then I heard the Lord say.

"Do you love Me more than these?"

THE BASEBALL PLAYER

A double play made two away,
when I came to the plate.

Nine innings gone and no one on,
the score was eight to eight.

I've always known when one is gone.
I felt it in the bat,
Before the ball had cleared the wall,
I jogged and tipped my hat.

As I jogged around the field,
And crossed home plate with ease,
I heard a still, small voice:
"Do you love Me more than these?"

THE SMOKER

I'm always broke, but still I smoke,
although the cost is high.
Some day this cough may knock me off,
to that ashtray in the sky.

I'd have more cash if I could trash,
that stinking poisonous weed.
It's just like dope: my only hope,

is conquering that need.

But just the thought of quitting makes me
weak down in my knees;
Especially when the Lord says,
"Do you love Me more than these?"

THE TIME TRAVELER

The Bible says the Spirit's ways
are sometimes quite sublime.
Then as I read the Book, I took
a trip somewhere in Time.

I stood beside a tepid tide,
of ancient inland sea.
With just that clue, somehow I knew
that this was Galilee

There afloat I saw a boat,
a half a mile offshore.

The crewmen let a fishing net
down to the ocean floor.

They filled the boat with fish they caught,
till it could hold no more.

They stowed their catch and closed the hatch,
and tried to make for shore.

But timbers creaked as water leaked
into the little boat,
Seawaves sloshed o'er decks awash;
they barely stayed afloat.

They finally reached the sheltered beach,
upon whose sand I stood.

Now on that sand I saw a man,
Whose scars I understood.

He helped the men unload their catch;
this bounty of the seas,

He asked the man named Peter:

"Do you love me more than these?"

A shocking crack now brought me back
to my own time and space.

As I recovered, I discovered
that HE was in this place.

Then I heard His frightening word
directed just to me;

"Leave it all and heed my call;
come and follow Me."

I felt the fears of forty years
welling up inside.

If I would live, I had to give
up all my earthly pride.

"It's been so long, the world's so strong,
I don't know what to do.

I can't let go these things, and so
I give them all to You."

I felt Him start to mold my heart,
a Potter working clay.

I felt my chains and worldly pains,
just melt and fall away.

So I had finally faced the truth;
the truth that set me free.

I knelt before the Lord and said,
"Before all, I love Thee!"

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THE VIEW FROM THE CLEFT

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Please be patient.

This poem is not finished yet.

In peaceful solitude I sought
a high deserted place.

The lonely desert seemed ideal
for me to seek God's face.

I walked for days until I came
upon an ageless stone;
and as I touched the rock, I knew
that I was not alone.

I knew the voice I heard was God's,
no other is the same:
a voice that came from everywhere
and called to me by name.

The Lord said, "Child, I know your need
and I'll provide a place
where you can safely hide and watch
as I show you My face".

A flash of lightning struck the rock
and as the thunder pealed,
the granite screamed and split apart
to form a stony weal.

The afterimage faded: stench
of ozone ##### the air.
And then the Father said to me:
"You can watch from there."

I carefully descended to
my steaming rocky crack.
I hunkered down and felt the stone
still warm against my back.

The Lord reached down and with His hand
He gently covered me.
Daylight vanished and I gazed
into infinity.

I looked into a void that
was not yet when or where:
the hour of creation and
I found the Father there.

I heard Him call the emptiness
and saw the darkness glow.
I learned, but could not understand,
things only God can know.

I saw His hand ignite the stars
and spin the earth in space.
From light to life, then all was done:
but still God hid His face.

Though witness to creation's birth
I never saw His face.

"I have not seen Your face, O Lord,"

I said in deep regret.

"Be patient, child," the Father said,

"I am not finished yet."

I stood beside that ancient street

we now call Sorrows' Way:

three men walked one last mile the day

before the Sabbath Day.

And as I watched their blood and pain

beneath a sunless sky,

among those three, I found one who

did not deserve to die.

His back was flayed down to the ribs

and briars had slashed his head.

Closer now: he looked like he

was seven steps from dead.

I looked into his tortured eyes,

and heard his ragged breath:
I knew this guiltless man was dying
someone else's death.

He staggered on toward Calvary
still bleeding on the sod:
and suddenly I knew that I
had seen the face of God!

He died, Who cannot die! and when
the sun refused to shine
although the pain and death were His,
I knew the guilt was mine.

The agony was His, but oh!
the guilt was surely mine.

I wailed and fell on hands and knees
as tears of anguish flowed
and splattered in the bloody dust

beside the Sorrows' Road.

"O God, O God, I should have died!"

I cried in my distress.

"Lord, take my life, I cannot bear
this guilt and loneliness."

Then I was back within my cleft.

I heard God say to me:

"Be still! and I will show you what
no man was there to see."

Just then I was surprised to feel
the touch of gentle rain.

The cooling moisture rinsed my tears
and eased my awful pain.

As quickly as it started, rain
no more fell on my face.

In predawn light I walked into

a quiet and peaceful place.

There in the center of a garden
stood a rocky dome,
and though I'd never seen this place
it felt to me like home.

The rising sun now lit its peak
and gradually edged down
until the dome looked like it wore
a blazing fiery crown.

There hewn within that rocky wall
I found a single room.
The mighty stone that sealed its door
had also sealed my doom.

The sun had risen higher now
beginning a new day.

Then all at once, and nothing first,

the stone just rolled away.

This place must surely be HIS grave,
its door now yawning wide,
for then I heard a voice I knew
say, "You may come inside."

"Come to Me and do not fear,
for I will comfort you.

You saw the stone do what it did
because I told it to!"

I saw Him and I knew his face:
I saw God's face again,
but on each hand, a livid scar
that cried of death and sin.

How could I see the face of God?

Atonement had been made.

When blood was shed that one last time

was my redemption paid.

And then I learned the meaning of
those awful scars He bore:
Messiah cleansed my sinful soul,
the guilt was mine no more.

Not by power! Or by might!
The guilt was mine no more!

The stonework softly sang His name.
Shekinah ##### the room:
His Holiest of Holies was
what once had been His tomb.

THE AMERICAN WORK ETHIC

My father was a craftsman,
A master in his trade.
He took great pride in what he did,

Not just how much he made.
Four hundred dollars every week,
Back then was real good pay.
One Sunday when they passed the plate in church,
I heard him pray:
"Forty dollars is our tithe;
That's holy to you Lord,
And twenty more for missions;
You said great is the reward,
And fifteen more to help the poor;
I know you said it's true,
If we do it to the least of them
We're doing it to you."

Dad lost his job when I was twelve
Cause times were really hard,
So I helped out the family
Washing cars and mowing yards,
One week I brought home sixty dollars,
All the cash we had,

When I gave dad that money,
This is what he said:
"Six dollars is our tithe, son;
That's holy to the Lord,
And a dollar on our missions pledge
Is all we can afford,
Let's give a dollar to the poor,
Cause Jesus said, you see,
If you do it to the least of these
You're doing it to me."

Well, dad and I are partners now
In a business of our own,
And all throughout the industry
Dad's craftsmanship is known,
We finished up a major contract
Just the other day,
With a million dollar check in hand,
I heard my father say:
"A hundred thousand is our tithe!

Glory! Praise the Lord!
And the same ammount to missions
I think we can afford,
Let's start a fund to help the poor,
Cause Jesus said, you see,
If you do it to the least of them,
You're doing it to me."

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Mama, Teach Me a Song

to Kelly Dennie

Mama, teach me a song of our people
that will reach to the heart of my soul.
Let me hear how the love
of a man and a woman
is a treasure more precious than gold.
Sing to me about babies and children.
Let me feel all the love in your song.
If I know that I'm part of a family,
then I'll always know where I belong.

Mama, teach me a song about heroes;
about champions and battles they won.
About courage and spirit,
and difficult choices,

and doing what has to be done.
Let me hear about standing on values
when it's hard just to know right from wrong.
Help me learn how to overcome weakness,
so I'll know what it takes to be strong.

Mama, teach me the song of the Hebrews,
that they sung in a strange hostile land,
when they cried out for God
to deliver their children
from the whip in the taskmaster's hand.
Let me hear how He saved them from horrors
that you don't want your children to see.
Let me learn all the evil of slavery
so I'll know what it means to be free.

Mama, teach me a song about Yeshua:
how He came to save me from my sin.
How He died on the cross
and was buried on Friday;
but Sunday He's living again!
Let me hear about miracles happening:
Cripples walking and blind men that see.
Let me learn all He did for the people
so I'll know what He's doing for me.

Mama, teach me a song about Yeshua:
about grace that is greater than sin.
Let me hear about power
and glory and mercy
and the King that is coming again.
Let me listen for trumpets and rapture:
Let me watch for a crack in the sky.
Maybe we'll be in that generation
of the Chosen who never will die!

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Angst

Sometimes we hit. Sometimes we miss.
We're getting old. We get like this.
We paint the house. We mow the grass.
Great things we plan don't come to pass.
What do we want? Where should we go?
What's right? What's wrong? How will we know?
We try to seek but cannot find.
What's real? What's only in our mind?
We live so near yet out so far
the sun is just a distant star.
So far we're lost in endless night.
So close we're blinded by the light.
Too soon: we try to grab too much.
Too late: there's nothing left to touch.
We make mistakes. We never learn.
What we send out does not return.
We don't remember where we've been
and make the same mistakes again.
But when we get depressed and sad
and our own anger makes us mad;
the friends and lovers of our youth
remind us where we found the truth.
In endless days when life turns strange
we seek the One Who does not change
as in our heart His spirit sings.
He shields our soul with mighty wings.
What if today He breaks the sky
and calls out those who'll never die?

It matters not how well we live.
Our treasure is the love we give.

Lloyd Barry Johnson, 1999