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Mormonbasics.com is humbled to bring you a commentary on the hymns published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This commentary is presented in a two-column format. The original text, as presented in the hymnbook published by the LDS Church, is in the left column. The comments on the right are provided by mormonbasics.com. We have even changed the color of the text so there won't be any question as to who wrote what.

Personal note from the commentator:
The hymns of the Church are sacred text. The Lord has made it very clear to us through his prophets that the singing of hymns is a form of prayer, and as such is sacred communication. Much of the sacred Spirit and reverence we experience in our meetings, especially Sacrament Meeting, comes from the Spirit that accompanies the singing of the hymns.

The hymns are written in poetic form, and as such are able to take certain licenses and liberties with the English language that cannot normally be expressed in any other way. It is certainly not the aim of this commentary to improve on the beauty of the poetic expressions found in our sacred hymns. As a teacher of English to those who speak other languages, I have found that many of the hymns have expressions that are difficult for some people to understand.

Because hymns are written to fit a set rhythmic pattern or meter, often the expression has to be condensed to fit in a small space, but still convey its intended meaning. It is the combination of the rhythm, text, and music that create such a powerful Spiritual experience when singing the hymns. My attempts to explain some of the meaning behind the text should not detract from the original meaning, nor should it replace the original meaning. Hymns, like parables, take on different meanings as the circumstances of our lives change. My commentary is only a starting point for (hopefully) a better understanding of the overall meaning of the hymn in this work. Anyone else writing this same commentary would have different perspectives and points to make. That is the nature of a commentary. I pray that what I say will, in some way, help in your understanding of this hymn. Since this is a personal study of the hymns, I will sometimes use the first person when writing the commentary.

Kelly P. Merrill

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Come, Listen to a Prophet's Voice

1. Come, listen to a prophet's voice,
And hear the word of God,
And in the way of truth rejoice,
And sing for joy aloud.
We've found the way the prophets went
Who lived in days of yore.
Another prophet now is sent
This knowledge to restore.

When we listen to the prophet, we hear the message God wants us to hear. The "way of truth" involves keeping the commandments. When we listen to the counsel of the prophet we find happiness in keeping the commandments. To "sing for joy aloud" refers to being so happy that only singing loudly about it will satisfy our souls.

The world did not know how the prophets lived (and found happiness) in centuries past (days of yore), but now we do, because the Lord has sent another prophet to restore this knowledge to us.

2. The gloom of sullen darkness spread
Thru earth's extended space
Is banished by our living Head,
And God has shown his face.
Thru erring schemes in days now past
The world has gone astray;
Yet Saints of God have found at last
The straight and narrow way.

The content of the first sentence says that the world was in spiritual darkness, and very unhappy about it as well. This miserable ignorance spread around the world until the prophet who speaks to God (our living head) brought us truth and joy, because we now know that God has come back to us. He has once again shown his face and speaks to man.

Because of incorrect ways of doing things (erring schemes) in the past the world went off course and stopped doing things the way the Lord wanted them done. They had gone "astray" or wandered off course. Now, with the guidance of the prophet the saints of God, (those who make covenants with God) have found the true path back to Him (the straight and narrow way).

3. 'Tis not in man they put their trust
Nor on his arm rely.
Full well assured, all are accursed
Who Jesus Christ deny.
The Savior to his people saith,
"Let all my words obey,
And signs shall follow living faith,
Down to the latest day."

The arm refers to someone's general strength or ability to perform something. We do not put our trust in mankind, nor do we rely on man's ability to save us. We have been promised that those who deny Christ will be cursed. The Savior tells us to obey his words, and if we do, signs or miracles will follow our faith forever.

4. Then heed the words of truth and light
That flow from fountains pure.
Yea, keep His law with all thy might
Till thine election's sure,
Till thou shalt hear the holy voice
Assure eternal reign,
While joy and cheer attend thy choice,
As one who shall obtain.

So listen and pay attention to the truth that comes from the purest sources. The prophets and Christ are referred to as fountains because they continually give us truth, like a fountain continually sends out more water.

Obey God's law with all your abilities until you have been assured of Celestial reward (election is sure). While you are doing this and waiting for the voice that will assure your place in the Celestial kingdom, you can live with joy and happiness because your choices will lead you there (as one who shall obtain).

MUSIC
Joseph J. Daynes, 1851-1920

TEXT

Joseph S. Murdock, 1822-1899. Verse four, Bruce R. McConkie, 1915-1985.

SCRIPTURES
Joseph Smith-History 1:14-17, Doctrine and Covenants 21:4-7