

The Story

At the age of 24, a Baptist evangelist, James Edwin Orr (1912-1987) known as J. Edwin, wrote this hymn following an Easter campaign in New Zealand.

During that campaign in 1936, revival fell on the people of New Zealand. Midnight services had to be added to accommodate the crowds. Many people were converted. Revival fire spread across the island nation. The key to this revival was the public confession and reconciliation of believers. A theme verse for that revival was **Psalm 139:1**, which says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart today."

As hearts were cleansed, the Holy Spirit moved in power.

As J. was set to leave New Zealand, 4 Maori girls came to him and sang him their native song of farewell. Impressed by the song... especially the tune, and still stirred by the revival he had witnessed there, J. quickly scribbled some verses on the back of an envelope while he was waiting in the post office of Ngaruawahia, New Zealand.

J. was a brilliant man who would go on to earn doctorates from universities in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. He would also study revival movements for the next 50 years, and write about them in several books. Of him, [Billy Graham](#) wrote, "Dr. J. Edwin Orr, in my opinion, is one of the greatest authorities on the history of religious revivals in the Protestant world." J. was influential in the [Campus Crusade for Christ](#), and was one of the five original board members of that organization.

But, he would probably be best known by most as the writer of this hymn... set to the music of (and the tune was named for) that farewell tune by those Maori girls: "Search Me, O God".

1. Search me, O God, and know my heart today,
Try me, O Saviour, know my thoughts, I pray;
See if there be some wicked way in me;
Cleanse me from every sin, and set me free.
2. I praise Thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin;
Fulfill Thy word and make me pure within;
Fill me with fire, where once I burned with shame;
Grant my desire to magnify Thy name.
3. Lord, take my life, and make it wholly Thine;
Fill my poor heart with Thy great love divine;
Take all my will, my passion, self and pride;
I now surrender, Lord, in me abide.
4. O Holy Ghost, revival comes from Thee;
Send a revival, start the work in me;
Thy Word declares Thou wilt supply our need;
For blessings now, O Lord, I humbly plead.

GOD'S WORD TO US:

There is nowhere you can go that I won't already be there, waiting and loving you.
There is nothing you can do that I don't already know about, haven't already forgiven.
Lay down, wherever you are, it is me that you are resting on, I am the one going before you, walking beside you, holding you when you are afraid, breathing My heart and My strength into you when you feel you can't go on.
I, I am the one who loves you, yesterday, today and to eternity.

Reading: Genesis 28:10-19 (NRSV)

¹⁰ Jacob left Beer-sheba and went towards Haran. ¹¹He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. ¹²And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³And the Lord stood beside him and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; ¹⁴and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.' ¹⁶Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!' ¹⁷And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'

¹⁸ So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

Reading: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 (NRSV)

²⁴ He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" ²⁸He answered, "An enemy has done this." The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" ²⁹But he replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn." '

³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.' ³⁷He answered, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

In this we find the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Song – Quiet and Still (Paul Gurr)

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=ot4UVznpOYM>

If I sing to the heavens, You are there,
If I speak deep and wounded, You are there;
If I call to the sunrise, You call to me,
Quiet and still.

With my words high and mighty, You are there,
With my song low and hurting, You are there;
For the ways that You know me,
Outnumber the sands from space.

If the night should surround me, are You there?
Is this night but the stillness of Your hands?
If I should lose my own worth?
In the calm of this world, Quiet and Still
- are You there?

In the ring of the heavens you are there
In the singing and the sounding You are there;
In the voice of a child, in the words of a friend
Quiet and still. Quiet and still.

Prayer

Quiet and still Lord, that's how I'd like my heart to be right now – quiet enough to hear the whisper of what You are waiting to say to me today; still enough to be seen and for me to see how much You care for this heart of mine; still, so that my life reflects that love to others. Let it be so Lord, Amen.

MESSAGE

As so often happens we come to today's reading in the middle of the story, we need to have some idea of what went before it, and sometimes even what comes after it, if we are to understand what we are reading. Jacob left Beer Sheba and went towards Haran.

Jacob's whole life has been one of conflict, cheating and deception. Born holding his brother by the heel the prophecy that accompanies him is that there will be strife. In the previous chapter, he has lied and cheated his aging father into handing over Esau's birthright and blessing – and let's not forget that his mother was the one who dreamed up the scheme and helped him make it happen.

Now, knowing that Esau plans to murder Jacob, Rebekah is at it again, scheming to save him by convincing Issac that Jacob needs a wife from the old country. Issac, who still hasn't figured out what a schemer his wife is, sends Jacob on his way on the pretext of finding a wife.

THAT'S where our story begins. Jacob the cheat, the conniver, is on the run. Somewhere out there is Laban's house, but in between there is a hard road, on his own – no mummy to protect him here. In front, a difficult and dangerous journey, and in the rear vision mirror he can see Esau sharpening the knife.

A journey like this brings things into perspective, there's nothing but time and the constant replay of every detail that led to this spot. If it was me, I'd be trying to justify what I'd done – and blaming everyone around me. It was Rebekah's fault for pushing him into it. It was

Issac's fault – it wasn't fair that Esau should get everything – hadn't Jacob proved even before he was born that he was the strong one? It was a nasty move of fate that Esau was born first. And now, here he was on the way to – where? The end of the earth to marry some plain jane. And what position would he have in the household? The poor relative. Bottom rung on the ladder and all the jobs no one else wanted. And how long would it be before he could go home? Would he ever be able to go home? Yes, he had the birthright - and the sword hanging over his head!

I wonder what he was thinking at the end of day one? I guess he was carrying food for the journey, but he couldn't help but think of the comfortable bed he'd left behind as he looked around for a place to sleep and chose – a stone for his pillow.

Have you ever been in a position where the only place you had to lay your head was a stone? Maybe not literally, but a hard place, a place that was going to bring you no comfort and only adding to the difficulty of the day just gone. A problem that was not going to change. Facing the days ahead and dreading every one. Confronting the reality of death, your own or someone you love, and the only place to lay your head is a stone.

THAT'S where we find Jacob. But that's also where we find God, or rather, where He finds us, waits for us, welcomes us. Jacob lies down and finds himself witnessing heaven. There - right there at his head, in the wilderness, in the darkness, in the unrelenting hardness of his life, is the open door of heaven - the angels ascending and descending on a ladder from heaven to earth. Ever notice how often God appears in the dark? Or is it just that we have to be at the end of our own resources before we can see what was always there?

When you look out on a dark night there are so many stars, if you can do that away from the lights of town there are so many more. But it's not the stars that have changed, without the bright distraction you are able to see what was always there. Abraham found that out. God said go outside, look up at the stars... Gideon was hiding in the dark in a wine press when he encountered God. Elijah was in the dark cave when he encountered God.

God stands beside Jacob and speaks. I am... those words that are so familiar to us, looking centuries into the future those are the words God will say to Moses. Fast forward and we will hear Jesus say these words. "I am the Lord." Each of us comes to a point in our lived when God stands beside us and speaks His name. Like Jacob each of us then has to decide whether to take the next step and say "the Lord shall be my God."

When Jacob wakes up the world is different. Surely God was in this place and I just didn't know it! He sets up a marker and renames this point in his journey and that's a name that will be carried on through the generations and become part of other people's journeys. When we encounter God do we share that with other people? Do we share the wonder of that moment, how our encounter with God has changed and shaped our journey? The story has to be told, to be passed on. So often we think that our children know our story, the things that have happened along the way. But children don't see the world the way we do, they don't always understand the connections that are so obvious to us. Do they know their own story? We speak about mission and sharing God's love; maybe God is inviting you to share the good news of His love in a way that only you can – by telling your own story.

That doesn't have to be, "Now sit down while I tell you about God!" When you sit with someone and listen with an open heart there are angels ascending and descending from heaven. When you mention someone's name in prayer you're opening a gate into heaven, right into the heart of God. When the church decides to carry some of the additional cleaning costs so that people can come together and not feel so weighed down by the burden of a pandemic world, the light of heaven is shining and we have the chance to say it's because we care. Who can we say that to? Where and how can we say that?

In today's gospel reading Jesus is talking about the kingdom of heaven, where it is, what it's like. Can I suggest that it's right here; in your next conversation, in the next phone call you make, in the smile you give as you walk down the street or down the hall in your own home. Surely the Lord is right here, in this place, in this moment, in the chance meeting – and I just didn't realise it. Let's make sure we DO realise that wherever we are, whoever we are with, whatever we are doing, no matter how insignificant it may seem, THIS moment is a gateway to heaven and if you close your eyes a moment you may just see angels descending and ascending into heaven.

Let's pray. Lord, we don't understand the way you work. In the midst of our darkest days You suddenly break through in the tiniest of things. Would You open our eyes to see that wherever we are there's an open gateway to Your love, however dark it may seem Your angels are right there, coming and going, carrying our cares and sharing Your grace. Help us to share Your kingdom, here and now, with everyone we meet. Amen

We respond

Prayers for others

*Adapted from a prayer by John Birch from his page Faith and Worship,
based on Ps 56: 13 and Ps 139: 13-14*

Circle us, Lord

Circle us with the light of your presence within this dark world

Enable us to be overcomers of fear and temptation

Enable us to be victors over sin and despair

Enable us to become those you know us to be,

(Silent prayer)

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation

Circle us with the light of your presence.

Circle us, Lord

Circle us as we grapple with the opinions of this world which don't reflect your love for the world.

Give us strength for our daily walk in your ways

Give us hope in the promises of your ways

Give us compassion and courage to walk with you as we walk with others

(Silent prayer)

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation

Circle our pathway with the light of your presence.

Circle us, Lord

Circle our family within the shelter of your outstretched arms

Protect them in each moment of their daily lives

Protect them in the decisions that they face as they wrestle with this world

Protect their homes and relationships

(Silent prayer)

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation

Circle our families with the light of your presence.

Circle us, Lord

Circle all your dear people with your outstretched arms

For you know them and love them

For you created their inner most being

For you know their coming and their going and are familiar with all their ways

(Silent prayer)

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation

Circle all of us with the light of your knowing.

Circle us, Lord

Circle this world with the joy of your Salvation

Where there is sickness and disease bring healing

Where there is hunger and despair bring hope

Where there is torture and oppression bring release

(Silent prayer)

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation

Circle this world with the light of your presence, Amen.

Song – Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttEgZLg-2-Y>

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place

I can feel His mighty power and His grace

I can hear the brush of angel wings, I see glory on each face

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

Offering

In responding to what we have read and how we have heard God speak to us, we commit ourselves to moving with God's Spirit, breathing life in the world around us. If you make a regular financial contribution to the Kiama-Jamberoo Congregation, consider putting that amount aside now and keeping it safe.

Notices

Keep an eye on the website, Facebook page and the e-news for updates. If you hear of or notice anyone needing a bit of extra support, please let Kath, Janice, or one of the Elders or Pastoral Partners know.

Sending Out

Benediction

May God's blessings surround you each day

As you trust Him and walk in His ways,

May His presence within guard and keep you from sin.

Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.

Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.

Prepared by Marion Haigh

I thought you might also like to see these words from one of Isaac Watts' hymns:

1. Lord, all I am is known to Thee;
In vain my soul would try
To shun Thy presence, or to flee
The notice of Thine eye.

2. Thine all-surrounding sight surveys
My rising and my rest,
My public walks, my private ways,
And secrets of my breast.

3. My thoughts lie open to Thee, Lord,
Before they're formed within;
And ere my lips pronounce the word,
Thou knowest the sense I mean.

4. Oh, wondrous knowledge, deep and high!
Where can a creature hide?
Within Thy circling arms I lie,
Beset on every side.

5. So let Thy grace surround me still,
And like a bulwark prove,
To guard my soul from every ill,
Secured by sovereign love.
Amen.

Source: [Book of Worship with Hymns and Tunes #99](#)