



²³ And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. ²⁴ And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. ²⁵ And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. ²⁶ And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. ²⁷ But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him! (Matt 8:23-27)

Great ships of the sea are formidable transports across the waters. Those who are chosen to pilot such ships must have many years experience at sea, and have an intimate knowledge of it, for many lives depend upon the Pilot, or Captain, of the ship. He must not only be familiar with global navigation, but with meteorological conditions to avoid which might place the ship in danger. No one would be more familiar with the ship's structure and endurance than the Maker of the Ship. But just knowing that technical knowledge is not enough. The Pilot must also be familiar with the nature of the Seas in which the ship sails. The absolutely perfect match for a Sea Pilot would be one who has had a direct hand in building the ship, and who also has such an intimate knowledge of the sea and its navigation. Who else would be more qualified than the Maker of the Ship and the Maker of the Seas – the Lord Jesus Christ? He is not only the Pilot of our Ship, but the Captain of our Souls.

There is a popular bumper sticker in Alabama that reads, "God is my co-pilot." That can never be the case, for He is either our pilot, or we go it alone! But the kind of Pilot to which we refer in this devotion is not a co-pilot of a plane or car, but the All-Knowing Pilot of the Seas the Seas of Life!

The seas offer such romantic sentiments of life and death. Remember the sinking of the 'unsinkable' North Star Liner, RMS Titanic, on which more than 1700 souls went to their watery graves in the North Atlantic singing, "Nearer my God to Thee." There is also the account of the old salty sea captain, John Newton, turned-clergyman and writer of beautiful hymns, such as Amazing Grace, who came back to the Lord in the hull of a battered sailing vessel off the coast of England. There was, too, a number of disciples on a lonely and threatening Galilean Sea who seemed about to perish at sea until they saw the Lord walking toward them upon the murky waters of the restless sea. Our hymn

today reflects that same Master of the Sea that walked upon the waters; that called out to John Newton as his evening star seemed to fade; that comforted the hearts of thousands in the icy waters of the Atlantic and sent them into eternity with a hymn song on their lips.

"Jesus Savior Pilot Me" is another classic hymn that I heard my mother sing over and over again when I was just a toddler. It has been a favorite of all maritime travelers who came from England and Ireland to the mountains of Tennessee by way of New York Harbor. The lyrics were written by Edward Harper, 1871, Pastor of the Church of Sea and Land in New York Harbor (now the first Chinese Presbyterian Church). The words were obviously inspired by the testimonies of many seaman who put into port at that church, and first appeared in *The Sailor's Magazine*. The musical score, *Pilot*, was composed by John E. Gould in the same year. On the night of his death, Harper went to his study to write his last hymn. He only wrote the first word – HEAVEN!

JESUS, SAVIOR, PILOT ME

Jesus, Savior, pilot me
Over life's tempestuous sea;
Unknown waves before me roll,
Hiding rock and treacherous shoal
.Chart and compass come from Thee;
Jesus, Savior, pilot me.

While th' Apostles' fragile bark
Struggled with the billows dark,
On the stormy Galilee,
Thou didst walk upon the sea;
And when they beheld Thy form,
Safe they glided through the storm.
Though the sea be smooth and bright,
Sparkling with the stars of night,
And my ship's path be ablaze
With the light of halcyon days,
Still I know my need of Thee;
Jesus, Savior, pilot me.

When the darkling heavens frown,
And the wrathful winds come down,
And the fierce waves, tossed on high,
Lash themselves against the sky,
Jesus, Savior, pilot me,
Over life's tempestuous sea.

As a mother stills her child,
Thou canst hush the ocean wild;
Boisterous waves obey Thy will,
When Thou sayest to them, "Be still!"
Wondrous Sovereign of the sea,
Jesus, Savior, pilot me.

When at last I near the shore,
And the fearful breakers roar
'Twixt me and the peaceful rest,

Then, while leaning on Thy breast,
May I hear Thee say to me,
“Fear not, I will pilot thee.”

“Jesus, Savior, pilot me Over life’s tempestuous sea; Unknown waves before me roll, Hiding rock and treacherous shoal. Chart and compass come from Thee; Jesus, Savior, pilot me.” Whether we know it or not, Jesus is the Pilot of all who sail the Gospel Sea. He is well acquainted with every shoal and breaker that lies ahead, and is able to navigate our souls around them by the Lighthouse of His Word. The storm bands build beyond the horizon, but the Master of the Sea is also the Master of the Storm. He will see us through to calm seas. He comforts our hearts with His tender greeting - the same with which he hailed the fearful disciples on the Midnight Sea of Galilee: *“And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, **Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.**”* (Matt 14:25-27) Jesus is our Chart – the WORD; and He is our compass – the Holy Ghost!

‘While th’Apostles’ fragile bark Struggled with the billows dark, On the stormy Galilee, Thou didst walk upon the sea; And when they beheld Thy form, Safe they glided through the storm.’ What a fearful thing it is to be cast upon the mercy of a force over which we have no control; however, we know the One who does exercise control over every element of His Creation, do we not? Just seeing Jesus approach on the waters of the sea was not enough. The disciples were at first fearful, believing it to be a spirit; but once He spoke His word of comfort, solace fell upon their hearts and they took courage. The sea is calmed at the Voice of Christ! Every storm of life is likewise calmed at the hearing of His voice, *“**Fear not! It is I.**”*

“Though the sea be smooth and bright, Sparkling with the stars of night, And my ship’s path be ablaze With the light of halcyon days, Still I know my need of Thee; Jesus, Savior, pilot me.” It is often true that the calmest sea precedes the most threatening storm. We are never in good stead until we are in the arms of our Lord. When all seems so well and trouble-free – this is the moment that we need Him most. For the dangers of the deep lurk just below the surface and seek our souls to destroy them when our guard is relaxed. We must realize our need for Christ in all circumstances of life – stormy seas, or calm waters.

“When the darkling heavens frown, And the wrathful winds come down, And the fierce waves, tossed on high, Lash themselves against the sky, Jesus, Savior, pilot me, Over life’s tempestuous sea.” We break sail in a fair sky with following winds. We are so sure of ourselves and feel completely satisfied at our smooth sailing. But, at sea, the weather can change on a dime and the storm clouds arise with sudden terror. The winds of doubt and shame build with the devil’s breath against our vessel. We look in fear at the towering clouds pictured against a dark and ominous sky. It is at this moment that we forsake our vain self-confidence and appeal to the Sovereign of the Seas. *“23 They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; 24 These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. 25 For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. 26 They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. 27 They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits’ end. 28 Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. 29 He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. 30 Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired*

haven." (Psalms 107:23-30) Can any poet's finger pen the words of this Psalm with greater beauty and meaning? Remember, He who calms the seas is also the One who sends the storms of trial.

"As a mother stills her child, Thou canst hush the ocean wild; Boisterous waves obey Thy will, When Thou sayest to them, "Be still!" Wondrous Sovereign of the sea, Jesus, Savior, pilot me." Only the Christian can know the security and safety available in the arms of our Lord. *"Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me."* (Psalms 63:7-8) Just as He holds the gentle lamb in His breast, the ocean and storm is also His creatures. He commands, and it is done! He speaks these words, *"Be Still!"* also to our souls in time of great trial.

"When at last I near the shore, And the fearful breakers roar 'Twixt me and the peaceful rest, Then, while leaning on Thy breast, May I hear Thee say to me, "Fear not, I will pilot thee." Our lives are represented by the great sea. Many saints approach the further shore of their struggles where dangers seem to multiply and darkness builds. This is the hour of the visitation of that Angel of Comfort called Death. But now, it is all that remains between him and the Haven of Rest and Joy. His bark approaches over tumultuous waves and breakers; yet, the great Master of the Seas steadies the helm, and trims the sail. We shall overcome! The sense of hearing is the last to fail at death, I am told by medical professionals. Perhaps that is God's way of whispering that last encouraging Word to our dying souls, *"Fear not, I will pilot thee."* Then we land on the fair shores of God's eternal paradise. The sound of the sea becomes music instead of terror, and the bright Sun of the never ending day lights our path forever. And, perhaps, we shall hear the words of another old Gospel hymn:

Oh, they tell me of a home far beyond the skies,
Oh, they tell me of a home far away;
Oh, they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise,
Oh, they tell me of an unclouded day.

Refrain:

Oh, the land of cloudless day,
Oh, the land of an unclouded sky,
Oh, they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise,
Oh, they tell me of an unclouded day.

Oh, they tell me of a home where my friends have gone,
Oh, they tell me of that land far away,
Where the tree of life in eternal bloom
Sheds its fragrance through the unclouded day.