



1 And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: 4 And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. 5 And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. (Rev 22:1-5)

The Word of God itself is a flowing River of Living Waters. The language in which God speaks to us is figurative and full of beauty, but our minds cannot conceive of the greater meaning and beauty behind those words – for there is no earthly vocabulary whereby the grace, mercy and promises of God can be conveyed to mortal man in whole. The utterances of the Holy Ghost cannot be fully described in the mundane vernacular of mankind. So God has given us symbolic and figurative description of things our minds are otherwise incapable of grasping. It is a testimony to man's lack of spiritual insight that causes him to habitually mistake the symbol for that which is being symbolized in both scripture and biblical prose. – the ultimate promises of God for their short-term manifestation toward us.

Today's hymn is an old one written in 1787 by Rev. Samuel Stennett. In this hymn, an old favorite of both the black and white races of days gone by, the symbols refer to that moment when we leave this body of clay behind and cross over the Jordan Waters to God our Father. It restates the very words of John Bunyan describing Christian crossing over the river and the "bugles sounding on the other side." This hymn has always held a special place in my heart, and I know not why. It may be because I heard it sung so often in my home and church with deep feeling while growing up, or it may be owing to the plaintive voices of the black folk of my early life whose voices cast a spell that I cannot forget. But it is powerful in its words and meaning.

It alludes, in allegorical symbols, to the crossing of the Jordan River of the

Children of Israel from the Wilderness of Moab, after forty years wandering, into that Land of Promise, made sure by the Word of God. But that event is only symbolic of the real crossing of Jordan Waters from this wilderness life on earth into the reward of Heaven which awaits every true Christian. Even to a greater extent, the Jordan River is very descriptive of the life of Christ. His ministry began at Jordan Banks and continued for three years - very often along its flowing waters. Some 35 miles north of The Sea of Galilee rises the heights of Mt. Hermon. Some believe it was Mt Hermon upon which Christ was transfigured. There are three gushing springs on Mt. Hermon that form tributaries that combine down the slopes of the mountain to form the Jordan River. The waters of Jordan come from on high, and they have their source in three springs much like unto the Trinity of God. The Jordan flows down to Galilee giving life-sustaining water and nutrients along its way. Either side of its banks are lush and green as it feeds into Galilee. In this way, it is much like the life of Christ – He gave life and sustenance everywhere He went.

The waters of Galilee teem with life, because the Sea surrenders its waters of the Jordan on its southern-most boundary. The Jordan continues plunging down through the wilderness gorge to the lowest point on earth – the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is dead because it never gives anything. It keeps every drop of water it receives. Here the Jordan River dies just as Christ came down to us, gave us life eternal, and died in our wilderness of sin for us. The River is little more than 100 miles long – one of the shortest of rivers. Just so, Christ, too, died in the prime of life – thirty three years of age. So read the words of this hymn thoughtfully, and sing it as well if you remember the tune. It will bless you now, and it will bless you when you feel the earth quake beneath your feet in old age, and the stormy sky scowls and blusters.

On Jordan's Stormy Banks

On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wishful eye
To Canaan's fair and happy land,
Where my possessions lie.

*I am bound for the promised land,
I am bound for the promised land;
Oh who will come and go with me?
I am bound for the promised land.*

All o'er those wide extended plains
Shines one eternal day;
There God the Son forever reigns,
And scatters night away.

*No chilling winds or poisonous breath
Can reach that healthful shore;
Sickness and sorrow, pain and death,
Are felt and feared no more.*

*When I shall reach that happy place,
I'll be forever blest,
For I shall see my Father's face,
And in His bosom rest.*

This beautiful old hymn from the past reminds us that we all must cross those waters at some point of God's own choosing. We are not permanent citizens of this world, but merely pilgrims and strangers in the earth. *"For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.....But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."* (Hebrews 11:14, 16)

During the War Between the States, a young hero of Smyrna, Tennessee was captured and charged with spying on the Federal Army. Dispatches were found hidden under his saddle and in his boots. He was not a spy, but instead, a courier; but the Union General was desperate to break up a spy ring known as "Coleman's Scouts." He demanded of the twenty-one year old Davis the name of the leader of the Coleman Scouts, but Sam Davis refused to divulge the name of his commander and comrade. Finally, Gen. Dodge, the Union General, said, "If you do not tell us the name, we shall be forced to hang you as a spy." Davis responded, "I would rather die a thousands deaths than to betray my cause." So, he was sentenced to be hung. He never recanted. His death gained for him the love and respect of men and women on both sides of the Mason Dixon Line. Museum Memorial is located at his former home in Smyrna, and a statue in the city square at Nashville.

The night before his execution, Chaplain James Young, who had spent the day praying with Sam, said that Samuel Davis asked if they might sing, "On Jordan's Stormy Banks." Chaplain Young later stated that he would never forget the power with which the young Davis sang this hymn just hours before actually crossing that River's Stormy Banks. Shall you sing it as well when you cross over?