

Give Me Jesus

1 In the morn-ing when I rise, in the morn-ing when I
 2 Dark mid-night was my cry, dark mid-night was my
 3 Oh, when I feel a - lone, oh, when I feel a -
 4 Oh, when I come to die, oh, when I come to

rise, in the morn-ing when I rise, give me Je - sus.
 cry, dark mid-night was my cry, give me Je - sus.
 - lone, oh, when I feel a - lone, give me Je - sus.
 die, oh, when I come to die, give me Je - sus.

Refrain

Give me Je - sus, give me Je - sus; you can

have all this world; give me Je - - sus.

Give Me Jesus is one of the most well-known African-American spirituals. Whether during spiritually bright mornings or dark nights in life, it centers believers on the truth behind Jesus's question in Matthew 16:26, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" The world devours souls, but Jesus saves them.

But wait...is it not a hymn? Yes...and no. Paul commands us to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (*Col. 3:16, Eph. 5:19*). Psalms are clearly catalogued in our Bibles; the others, less so. Hymns (generally) use rigid harmony and rhythm to praise God in reflection on deep truths. Spiritual songs are no less rooted in deep truth, but (generally) use emotive melodies to passionately declare these truths across the Christian life in joy or sorrow, success or suffering, feast or famine. Many hymnals include songs from all three categories because all are vital for God's people.

More specifically, what we know in America as spirituals are songs that came from African-American believers suffering from the horrors of slavery. The famous Frederick Douglass recalls that these songs "breathed the prayers and complaint of souls suffering the most cruel anguish. Each voice was a witness against slavery and a prayer that God would deliver us from our chains. . . I often found myself in tears listening to them."

"Give Me Jesus" is a poignant example of one. It has a similar history to many spirituals, drawing from Scripture, experience, and locally sung hymns (in this case, in early 19th-century South Carolina). It was passed down orally over several generations before first being written down, with many different verses and variations in existence today.

As a result, its author remains unknown. But clearly, its authorship belongs to the enslaved African-American church, whose testimony of persevering faith should humble us to join in with the cry: "you can have all this world; give me Jesus!"

Scripture to consider:

Exodus 3

Psalm 143

John 17:20-26

Psalm 5

Matthew 16:13-28

Revelation 21-22

Psalm 16

Mark 8:27-38