



## Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing

**Text: Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676)**

**Tune: Johann Balthasar König (1691-1758)**

At times it seems like the world is crumbling around us. Despair is easy to come by, tears are our drink, and grief our bread. Though it may seem that God has forgotten us, that He is far away and uncaring, we know that is not the truth. He is our Portion, our Shield, and our Hope. He allows crosses to come to us to teach us to lean on Him. Through the passing trials of life, we see how His fatherly goodness tends to all things and in the end gives us the greatest joy. In heaven, we will truly see how all things worked for our good!

Hymns that teach this truth were the signature of Paul Gerhardt. The description of his life is best seen in the inscription under a painting of him in the last church he served in Lübben, Germany. Under that painting is the phrase, *Theologus in cribro Satanae versatus*, “the theologian tested in Satan’s sieve.” At an early age, his father died, while the Thirty Years’ War raged throughout Germany. On January 2, 1628 Gerhardt entered theological studies at the University of Wittenberg, where he remained until April 1642. He then became a private tutor in Berlin, where his gift of poetry was nurtured. Johann Crüger took note of Gerhard’s gift for hymnwriting and included most of his available hymns in his hymnal *Praxis Pietatis Melica*. In 1655 Gerhard married Anna Maria Berthold. Their first daughter died in infancy, and the family suffered from extreme poverty. In 1657 he became assistant Pastor at St. Nicholas Church in Berlin. However, here he became caught in the theological battles of the time. The elector of Berlin, Friedrich Wilhelm the Great, thought Gerhardt sided with the Calvinists, when he was, in fact, a strong Lutheran. When he would



not be a part of the false unity between the Lutherans and Calvinists, he was removed from office and not even allowed to preach in his own home. Gerhardt referred to this as his “Berlin Martyrdom.” While this battle was raging, Gerhardt and his wife had five more children, but three of them did not live past their first few days. At the end of his “Berlin Martyrdom,” another son died, and Anna Maria was seriously ill. He eventually returned to his congregation in the spring of 1668. However, at Easter of that same year, his wife died. Gerhardt’s only surviving family was a six year old son. In 1669 Gerhardt was Called to serve as Pastor in Lübben, where he remained until his death. In total Gerhardt wrote 133 hymns (21 of them are in *The Lutheran Hymnal*). However, while several other composers from his era see declining translation into English and inclusion into hymnals, Gerhardt’s hymns are actually seeing a resurgence, and new Lutheran hymnals are translating and including more of his hymns, especially ones that were unknown.

“Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing” is not its own hymn. It is a part of Gerhardt’s hymn of thanksgiving “O Lord, I Sing with Lips and Heart,” (*TLH* 569). Because of that hymn’s length (18 stanzas), it was cut in half, and the second half became “Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing.” William Nelle, a German hymn commentator, said of this hymn: “Gerhardt has experienced the fatherly love of God in Christ, the Holy Spirit has transfigured Jesus in his heart and testified to him that we are the children of God. That is the center of his life. In this center he stands firm. And because he cannot be moved from this position, he can let his eye sweep freely, without fear of limitation, over all areas of divine and human life.”

This free searching of divine involvement in our lives is seen clearly in this hymn. He openly confronts our “blank despair” and “restless thought” (st. 3) which often characterizes this life. Instead of wallowing in pity, we must cast this care on our Creator, who loves us and will make our burden light. The Lord sees every joy and every sorrow, and allows them for a reason. He notes every tear (st. 7), and will wipe them away in heaven when He brings us to our happy ending (st. 8). Knowing that He loves us and cares for us, we “trust His guiding love,” (st. 9), and follow Him until He brings us to heaven above.