

"Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen" BWV 32

1. (Seele) Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen,  
Sage mir, wo find ich dich?  
Soll ich dich so bald verlieren  
Und nicht ferner bei mir spüren?<sup>1</sup>  
Ach! mein Hort, erfreue mich,  
Lasst dich höchst vergnügt umfängen.

2. (Jesus) *Was ists, dass du mich gesuchet?  
Weisst du nicht, dass ich sein muss in dem, das  
meines Vaters ist?*<sup>3</sup>

3. (Jesus) Hier, in meines Vaters Stätte,  
Findt mich ein betrübter Geist.  
Da kannst du mich sicher finden  
Und dein Herz mit mir verbinden,  
Weil dies meine Wohnung heisst.

4. (Seele) Ach! heiliger und grosser Gott,  
So will ich mir  
Denn hier bei dir  
Beständig Trost und Hülfe suchen.

(Jesus) Wirst du den Erdentand verfluchen  
Und nur in diese Wohnung gehn,

1. (Soul) Most beloved Jesus, my desire,  
Tell me, where will I find you?  
Shall I lose you so soon  
And no longer feel you by me?  
Ah! My refuge<sup>2</sup> [Jesus], make me glad;  
Be embraced most delightedly.

2. (Jesus) *Why is it that you sought me [in other places]?  
Do you not know that I must be [here, engaged] in that  
which is of [God] my father?*

3. (Jesus) Here, in [God] my father's<sup>4</sup> [dwelling] place,  
Will a grieved spirit find me.  
You can assuredly find me there  
And bind your heart with me,  
Because this [place] is called my dwelling.

4. (Soul) Ah! Holy and great God,  
Thus for myself will I then  
Here [in this dwelling place]  
Steadfastly seek comfort and help in you.

(Jesus) If you will curse earthly vanity<sup>7</sup>  
And but proceed into this dwelling [place],

GENERAL NOTE: This libretto borrows language and narrative elements from the Song of Songs, where the young woman looks for her beloved (drawn upon allegorically in the libretto, as the Christian soul seeking its "bridegroom," Jesus), and from the gospel of Luke, where Mary and Joseph, the parents of Jesus, look for the boy Jesus, who is missing when it is time to go home after the pilgrimage festival of Passover in Jerusalem (likewise drawn upon allegorically in the libretto—hence Bach's musical setting of the second movement is for bass, to convey the voice of the adult Christ, rather than for a boy soprano, which is what would have been required for a literal setting). The original printed libretto features only movement 1–5; it is unclear who added the hymn stanza that Bach set as movement 6.

<sup>1</sup>Some modern editions have mistranscribed this line as "Und nicht ferner bei mir *führen*" ("and not *lead* you with me further").

<sup>2</sup>In the Luther Bibles, "mein Hort" ("my refuge"), frequently applied to God, is a common, figurative rendering of what is typically translated from the Hebrew more literally in English Bibles as "my rock."

<sup>3</sup>This text is nearly identical to Luke 2:49, where Jesus says "Was ists, dass ihr mich gesuchet habt? Wisset ihr nicht, dass ich sein muss in dem, das meines Vaters ist?" ("Why is it that you [plural] have sought me [elsewhere]? Do you [plural] not know that I must be [here, in the Temple, engaged] in that which is of [God] my father?").

<sup>4</sup>This movement derives some of its key language from John 14:2, where (in Luther's rendering) Jesus says to his disciples, "In meines Vaters Hause sind viel Wohnungen; wenns nicht so wäre, so wollte ich zu euch sagen: Ich gehe hin, euch die Stätte zu bereiten" ("In [God] my father's house [in heaven] are many dwellings; if it were not so, then [why] would I have said to you: I am going there, to prepare the places for you"). The original printing of this libretto, in 1711, reads "in meines Vaters *Städte*," a variant spelling of "Stätte" rather than a plural ("in my father's *cities*").

<sup>7</sup>"Erdentand" is the German equivalent of the Latin "vanitas vitae," the vanity of human life on earth.

So kannst du hier und dort bestehn.

(Seele) *Wie lieblich ist doch deine Wohnung,  
Herr, starker Zebaoth;  
Mein Geist verlangt  
Nach dem, was nur in deinem Hofe prangt.  
Mein Leib und Seele freuet sich  
In dem lebendigen Gott:*<sup>5</sup>  
Ach! Jesu, meine Brust liebt dich nur<sup>6</sup> ewiglich.

(Jesus) So kannst du glücklich sein,  
Wenn Herz und Geist  
Aus Liebe gegen mich entzündet heisst.

(Seele) Ach! dieses Wort, das itzo schon  
Mein Herz aus Babels Grenzen reisst,  
Fass ich mir andachtsvoll in meiner Seele ein.

5. (à 2) Nun verschwinden alle Plagen,  
Nun verschwindet Ach und Schmerz.  
(Seele) Nun will ich nicht von dir lassen,  
(Jesus) Und ich dich auch stets umfassen.  
(Seele) Nun vergnüget sich mein Herz  
(Jesus) Und kann voller Freude sagen:  
(à 2) Nun verschwinden alle Plagen,  
Nun verschwindet Ach und Schmerz.

**6. Mein Gott, öffne mir die Pforten  
Solcher Gnad und Gütigkeit;  
Lass mich allzeit allerorten**

Then you can abide here [on earth] and there [in heaven].

(Soul) *How lovely indeed is your dwelling [place],  
Lord, mighty Sabaoth;*<sup>8</sup>  
*My spirit longs  
For that which shines forth only in your [Temple]<sup>9</sup> court.  
My body and soul rejoice  
In the living God;  
Ah! Jesus, my breast just loves you eternally.*

(Jesus) Thus can you be happy  
When heart and spirit  
Are called inflamed out of love for me.

(Soul) Ah! This word [of wisdom], which now already  
Plucks my heart out of [evil] Babylon's borders,<sup>10</sup>  
I enclose devoutly in my soul.

5. (à 2) Now all torments vanish,  
Now [the cry] "alas-and-agony" vanishes.  
(Soul) Now I will not leave you,  
(Jesus) And I will also embrace you always.  
(Soul) Now my heart is delighted  
(Jesus) And can say, full of joy:  
(à 2) Now all torments vanish,  
Now "alas-and-agony" vanishes.

**6. My God, open to me the gates  
Of such mercy and goodness [as yours];  
Let me at all times, in all places,**

<sup>5</sup>These lines are a poetic paraphrase that is nearly identical to Psalm 84:2-3, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen, HERR Zebaoth! Meine Seele verlanget und sehnet sich nach den Vorhöfen des HERRN; mein Leib und Seel freuen sich in dem lebendigen GOTT" ("How lovely are your dwellings, LORD [whose name is] Sabaoth! My soul desires and pines for the forecourts [of the Temple] of the Lord; my body and soul rejoice in the living God").

<sup>6</sup>Some modern editions and the original printing of this libretto here read "nun" ("now"), but Bach's own score and performing part clearly read "nur," though the intended meaning is far from clear.

<sup>8</sup>Depending on context, "Herr Zebaoth" could mean "Lord of [army] hosts," or "Lord [whose name is] 'Sabaoth,'" or "[God, whose name is] 'Lord of [Army] Hosts,'" or "[God, whose name is] 'Lord Sabaoth.'" In Jeremiah 32:18, the prophet says to God, "du grosser und starker Gott, HERR Zebaoth ist dein Name" ("you great and mighty God, 'LORD Sabaoth' is your name").

<sup>9</sup>See fn. 5, above.

<sup>10</sup>"Babel" is the Hebrew name for "Babylon" (from the Akkadian for "the gate of the god"). The contrast implied here is between this evil temporal earthly city of "Babylon" and the good eternal heavenly city of "Jerusalem." The book of Revelation continually refers to Rome as a "Babylon," as its author took pagan Rome's hostile attitude toward the followers of Jesus to be like Babel's toward the Israelites in the Hebrew Bible. The Lutheranism of Bach's day applied this sentiment additionally to the "Babylon" it called "the kingdom of the Antichrist," namely the Roman Catholic church.

**Schmecken deine Süßigkeit!  
Liebe mich und treib mich an,  
Dass ich dich, so gut ich kann,  
Wiederum umfang und liebe  
Und ja nun nicht mehr betrübe.<sup>11</sup>**

Georg Christian Lehms (movements 1–5)

**Taste your sweetness.  
Love me, and prod me  
So that I in turn, as best I can,  
May embrace and love you  
And, yes, may now aggrieve you no more.<sup>12</sup>**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



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<sup>11</sup>A stanza of “Weg, mein Herz, mit den Gedanken.”

<sup>12</sup>This is often translated as if only the “ich” of line 6 carries over to line 8, yielding the sense “that I may be grieved no more.” But it is the “ich dich” that carries over, yielding the sense “that I may aggrieve you no more.” The language of line 8 is apparently derived from Sirach 3:14, “betrübe ihn ja nicht” (literally, “grieve him [your father], yes, not”), and Ephesians 4:30, “Betrübet nicht den Heiligen Geist Gottes” (“do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God”).