

“Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem Glücke” BWV 84

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| 1. Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem Glücke,
Das mir der liebe Gott beschert.
Soll ich nicht reiche Fülle haben,
So dank ich ihm vor kleine Gaben
Und bin auch nicht derselben wert. | 1. I am content with my [good and bad] fortune
That dear God ordains ¹ unto me.
If I am not to have rich abundance,
Then I thank him for small gifts;
And [I] am not worthy even of those. |
| 2. Gott ist mir ja nichts schuldig,
Und wenn er mir was gibt,
So zeigt er mir, dass er mich liebt;
Ich kann mir nichts bei ihm verdienen,
Denn was ich tu, ist meine Pflicht.
Ja! wenn mein Tun gleich noch so gut geschienen,
So hab ich doch nichts Rechtes ausgericht.
Doch ist der Mensch so ungeduldig,
Dass er sich oft betrübt,
Wenn ihm der liebe Gott nicht überflüssig gibt.
Hat er uns nicht so lange Zeit
Umsonst ernähret und gekleidet
Und will uns einsten seliglich
In seine Herrlichkeit erhöhn?
Es ist genug vor mich,
Dass ich nicht hungrig darf zu Bette gehn. | 2. God indeed owes me nothing,
And when he gives me anything [at all],
Then he is showing me that he loves me;
[By my works] I am able to merit nothing with him, ²
For what [good] I [can] do is [only] my obligation [to him].
Yes, even if my doings have appeared ever so good,
I have, to the contrary, brought to pass nothing righteous.
Yet humankind is so impatient
That it often finds itself aggrieved
When dear God does not give [good things] to it overflowingly. ³
Has he not, for such a long time,
Fed and clothed us, without merit ⁴ [on our part],
And will [he not] someday blessedly
Lift us up into his glory [in heaven]?
It is enough for me
That I do not have to go to bed hungry. |
| 3. Ich esse mit Freuden mein wenig Brot
Und gönne dem Nächsten von Herzen das Seine.
Ein ruhig Gewissen, ein fröhlicher Geist,
Ein dankbares Herze, das lobet und preist,
Vermehret den Segen, verzuckert ⁵ die Not. | 3. With joy I will eat my scant bread,
And from my heart will not begrudge my neighbor his.
A quiet conscience, a cheerful spirit,
A thankful heart that lauds and praises,
Increases blessing, sweetens privation. |
| 4. Im Schweisse meines Angesichts
Will ich indes mein Brot geniessen,
Und wenn mein Lebenslauf, | 4. [Only] by the sweat of my brow |

¹“Bescheren” can mean simply “to bestow,” but in connection with God it typically carries the sense of providential giving: “to appoint,” “to ordain.”

²The sense of this line is derived from Romans 11:6, “Ists aber aus Gnaden, so ist nicht aus Verdienst der Werke; sonst würde Gnade nicht Gnade sein. Ists aber aus Verdienst der Werke, so ist die Gnade nichts” (“If it [justification for eternal salvation] is from [Christ’s] grace, then it is not from [the] merit of [doing the] works [of the law of Moses]; otherwise grace would not be grace”).

³In later German, “überflüssig” is generally employed as a synonym for “unnötig” (“superfluous[ly]” in the sense of “unnecessary, uncalled for”), but in older German it was sometimes, as here, employed as a synonym for “überfließend” (“overflowing[ly]”); e.g., Luke 6:38, in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, speaks of “ein überflüssiges Mass (“a [good] quantity/portion, running over,” “an overflowing measure”).

⁴“Umsonst” is employed here apparently not in its senses of “vergebens” (“in vain”) or “ohne Vergütung” (“without [our] recompense”) or “kostenlos” (“free[ly]/without charge”), but of “ohne Verdienst” (“without [our] merit”).

⁵Some modern editions change this “verzuckert” (“sweetens”; or literally/technically, “saccharifies” [i.e., to convert starch into sugar]) to “versüsset” (“sweetens”).

Mein Lebensabend wird beschliessen,
So teilt mir Gott den Groschen aus,
Da steht der Himmel drauf.
O! wenn ich diese Gabe
Zu meinem Gnadenlohne habe,
So brauch ich weiter nichts.

Will I meanwhile [be able to] savor my bread,⁶
And when the course of my life [as a “vineyard laborer”],
The evening of [this “day” that is] my life, will come to a close,
Then God will pay me the [day’s-wage] coin⁷
[Where] there is [an image of] heaven [stamped] upon it.⁸
Oh, if I have this gift
As my [unmerited] wage of [God’s] grace,
Then I will need nothing more.

**5. Ich leb indes in dir vergnüget
Und sterb ohn alle Kümmeris,
Mir genüget, wie es mein Gott füget,
Ich glaub und bin es ganz gewiss:
Durch deine Gnad und Christi Blut
Machst du’s mit meinem Ende gut.⁹**

**5. Meanwhile I will live content in you
And die without any grief;
It suffices for me how ever my God sets [things] in order;
I believe and am entirely certain of it:
By your grace and Christ’s blood
You will make it [go] well at my [life’s] end.**

Christian Friedrich Henrici (Picander) [adapted]

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to <http://www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV84> for an annotated translation

⁶An adaptation of Genesis 3:19, where God says to Adam, upon what has traditionally been interpreted as God’s punishment of Adam and Eve for their fall into sin, “Im Schweisse deines Angesichts sollst du dein Brot essen” (“In/By the sweat of your face/brow [from the hard work of cultivating unproductive soil] shall you [from now on, banished from the Garden of Eden, get] your bread [to] eat”). The cantata poetry employs the word “geniessen” (“to enjoy/savor”), not the simpler “essen” (“to eat”), to accommodate a rhyme with “beschliessen” (“to conclude,” “to come to an end”).

⁷The sense of lines 4–5 is derived from the parable of the vineyard laborers in Matthew 20:1-16 (the gospel reading at the liturgical occasion that this cantata was designed for), where the kingdom of heaven is likened to a householder who at various points in the day hires laborers for his vineyard but in the evening pays them all the same day’s wage, a “denarius” coin. The Luther Bibles rendered this “denarius” as a “Groschen.” Lutheranism taught that the householder’s paying his “day laborers” a “Groschen” in the “evening” represented God’s end-time portioning out the unmerited divine reward of eternal salvation to all people of upright behavior who had received the unmerited gift of Christian faith.

⁸“Da steht der Himmel drauf” (literally, “here/there/because stands heaven hereon/thereon/afterward”) is an extremely clumsy line of poetry. This has typically been rendered in English along the lines of “As sure as heaven stands,” or as “With this Heaven is/stands open.” The more likely sense, however, is derived from the narrative in Luke 20:20-26 (with parallels in Mark 12:13-17 and Matthew 22:15-22) about whether it was right for Judeans to pay tribute to the Roman emperor. In the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day Luke 20:24-25 reads “Zeiget mir den Groschen; wes Bild und Überschrift hat er? Sie antworteten und sprachen: Des Kaisers. Er aber sprach zu ihnen: So gebet dem Kaiser, was des Kaisers ist, und Gott, was Gottes ist” (“[And Jesus said:] ‘Show me the denarius [the Roman coin]; whose image and inscription does it have [stamped upon it]?’ They answered, declaring: ‘The emperor’s.’ But he declared to them: ‘Then give to the emperor what is the emperor’s, and to God what is God’s’”). The import of the cantata poetry, then, would be that its “Groschen” is stamped with heaven’s—i.e., not the emperor’s but the kingdom of God’s—image.

⁹A stanza of “Wer weiss, wie nahe mir mein Ende?”