

“Sehet! Wir gehn hinauf gen Jerusalem” BWV 159

1. [JESUS]

*Sehet!*¹

[DER GLÄUBIGE]

Komm, schau doch, mein Sinn,

Wo geht dein Jesus hin?

[JESUS]

Wir gehn hinauf

[DER GLÄUBIGE]

O harter² Gang! hinauf?

O³ ungeheurer Berg, den meine Sünden zeigen!

Wie sauer wirst du müssen steigen!

[JESUS]

*Gen⁴ Jerusalem.*⁵

[DER GLÄUBIGE]

Ach, gehe nicht!

1. [JESUS]

See!

[BELIEVER]

Come, do behold,⁶ [o] my sense [of good and evil]:⁷

Where is your Jesus going?

[JESUS]

We are going up

[BELIEVER]

O harsh course [that my Jesus goes upon]! Up?

O monstrous mountain [Golgotha]⁸ that my sins point to!

How arduously⁹ will you [Jesus] have to climb!

[JESUS]

*To Jerusalem [for my final Passover].*¹⁰

[BELIEVER]

Ah, do not go!

¹These are the words of Jesus to his disciples as given in Luke 18:31, which in Bach's cantata are applied to the contemporary believer.

²“Herber” in the poet's printed version of the text, but both “O herber Gang” and “O harter Gang” can be rendered as “O harsh course.”

³“Ach” (“Ah”) in the poet's printed version of the text.

⁴“Gen” is older German for “gegen” in the sense of “toward” or “to.”

⁵Luke 18:31.

⁶These opening two lines combine and link the “Sehet” (“see”) of Luke 18:31 with the passage “Schauet doch und sehet, ob irgendein Schmerz sei wie mein Schmerz” (“Do behold and see if any sorrow be like my sorrow”) from Lamentations 1:12.

⁷“Sinn” here apparently draws on the import of the “Sinnen” (“senses”) in Hebrews 5:13-14, “Wem man noch Milch geben muss, der ist unerfahren in dem Wort der Gerechtigkeit, denn er ist ein junges Kind; den Vollkommenen aber gehört starke Speise, die durch Gewohnheit haben geübte Sinnen zum Unterscheid des Guten und des Bösen” (“Whoever one must still give ‘milk’ [as sole diet], that man is inexperienced in the word of righteousness, for he is [like] an infant; but ‘solid food’ belongs to the perfected, who by custom have [their] senses exercised to the discerning of good and evil”).

⁸The “mountain” that Jesus goes to climb is “Golgotha,” the site of Jesus's death by crucifixion, which is understood as a sacrifice to God for humanity's sin. Golgotha's precise location outside the city walls of Jerusalem is not known, but partly because it was said in Matthew 27:55 to be visible from afar, some interpreters, including Luther, thought of this apparently high place as a “mountain,” and thus German writers referred to it as “Berg Golgotha” (“Mount Golgotha”).

⁹“Saur” in older German was used variously, including as a synonym for “beschwerlich” (“arduous”).

¹⁰Jesus “goes up to Jerusalem” for his final Passover celebration, when he will be crucified: Luke 18:31-33 reads “Er nahm aber zu sich die Zwölfe und sprach zu ihnen: Sehet, wir gehen hinauf gen Jerusalem, und es wird alles vollendet werden, das geschrieben ist durch die Propheten von des Menschen Sohn; denn er wird überantwortet werden den Heiden, und er wird verspottet und geschmähet und verspeiet werden, und sie werden ihn geisseln und töten; und am dritten Tage wird er wieder auferstehen” (“But he [Jesus] took aside the twelve [disciples] and said to them: ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem [for Passover], and all will be fulfilled that is written by the prophets about the son of man; for he [the son of man—me, Jesus] will be handed over to the gentiles [Pilate, the governor of Judea, with his Roman soldiers], and he will be mocked and reviled and spat upon, and they [the gentiles] will scourge him and put him to death [on the cross]; and on the third day he will rise again [from the dead]”). Bach's audiences heard these words chanted as part of the gospel portion (Luke 18:31-43) at the liturgical occasion for which this cantata was composed.

Dein Kreuz ist dir schon zugericht,
Wo du dich sollst zu Tode bluten;
Hier sucht man Geisseln vor, dort bindt man Ruten;
Die Bande warten dein;
Ach, gehe selber nicht hinein!
Doch bliebest du zurücke stehen,
So müsst ich selbst, nicht nach Jerusalem,
Ach, leider in die Hölle gehen.

2. Ich folge dir nach
**Ich will hier bei dir stehen,
Verachte mich doch nicht!**
Durch Speichel und Schmach;
Von dir will ich nicht gehen,
Am Kreuz will ich dich noch umfassen,
Bis dir dein Herze bricht.
Dich lass ich nicht aus meiner Brust,
Wenn dein Haupt wird erblassen
Im letzten Todesstoss,
Und wenn du endlich scheiden musst,
Alsdenn will ich dich fassen
Sollst du dein Grab in mir erlangen.

Your cross has already been built for you,
Where [for my salvation] you shall bleed yourself¹¹ to death;
Here¹² whips¹³ are sought, there¹⁴ rods are bound,¹⁵
The bonds [of confinement]¹⁶ await you;
Ah, do not [let] yourself enter [this confinement]!
Yet, were you to hold back [from your destiny],
Then I myself would have to go, not to [the heavenly] Jerusalem¹⁷
[But], ah, alas into hell.

2. I [shall] follow after you
**I will stand here with you;
Do not despise me.**
Through [all your endurance of] spittle and humiliation,¹⁹
I will not go from you,
I will still embrace you on the cross;
[Even] to the point [where] your heart breaks.
I will not let you [go] from my breast;
When your face²⁰ turns pale
In the final deathblow,
And when you must finally depart [this earthly life],
Then I will hold you

¹¹The use of the reflexive rather than simple indicative with the verb “bluten” (“bleed”) is presumably meant to emphasize that Jesus actively bled on the cross, to give of himself—i.e., his bleeding was not passive, merely the inevitable result of his violent treatment.

¹²“Hier” (“here”) and “dort” (“there”) are apparently used here in their figurative (i.e., loose, indeterminate) senses.

¹³This “Geisseln” is apparently not the gerund “das Geisseln” (“whipping/scourging”) but the noun “die Geissel” (“whip”) in its plural, “Geisseln.”

¹⁴See fn. 12, above.

¹⁵“Ruten binden” (“to bind rods”) here has a double meaning, the one literal and the other metaphorical. This line is apparently drawing on the older-German expression “sich selbst eine Rute binden” (“to bind [for] one’s self a rod [that one will be punished with]”), which was figurative for “selbst Ursache an einem Übel sein” (“to be one’s self the cause of an evil”).

¹⁶These are not the bonds of death spoken of in Psalm 18 but the bonds of confinement spoken of in Acts 20. The language of this line, namely the expression “Bande warten” (“bonds await”), derives its sense from what is said by the apostle Paul to the Ephesians in Acts 20:22-23, “Und nun siehe, ich . . . fahre hin gen Jerusalem, weiss nicht, was mir daselbst begegnen wird, ohne dass . . . Bande und Trübsal warten mein daselbst” (“And now see, I . . . am going forth to Jerusalem, [and] I do not know what will confront me in said place, only that . . . bonds/chains [of confinement (Acts 21:11)] and tribulations await me in said place”); Jesus, similarly, was “bound” before his crucifixion (John 18:12, 18:24).

¹⁷Presumably an allusion to Hebrews 12:22, “Ihr seid kommen zu dem Berge Zion und zu der Stadt des lebendigen Gottes, zu dem himmlischen Jerusalem” (“you [followers of Jesus] have come to the mount Zion and to the city of the living God, to the [foretaste of the] heavenly Jerusalem”).

¹⁹Jesus’s suffering shame and spitting (Luke 18:32) was traditionally understood as having been foreshadowed in Isaiah 50:6, “Ich hielt meinen Rücken dar denen, die mich schlugen; . . . mein Angesicht verbarg ich nicht vor Schmach und Speichel” (“I held up by back to those who struck me; . . . my face I hid not from humiliation and spittle”).

²⁰Literally, “When your head turns pale.” Many hymnbooks of Bach’s day here read “Wenn dein Herz wird erblassen” (“When your heart turns pale”), which is the rendering employed in movement 17 of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*.

In meinen Arm und Schoss.¹⁸

3. Nun will ich mich,
Mein Jesu, über dich
In meinem Winkel grämen;
Die Welt mag immerhin
Den Gift der Wollust zu sich nehmen,
Ich labe mich an meinen Tränen
Und will mich eher nicht
Nach einer Freude sehnen,
Bis dich mein Angesicht
Wird in der Herrlichkeit erblicken,
Bis ich durch dich erlöset bin;
Da will ich mich mit dir erquicken.

4. Es ist vollbracht,
Das Leid ist alle,
Wir sind von unserm Sündenfalle
In Gott gerecht gemacht.
Es ist vollbracht,
Nun will ich eilen
Und meinem Jesu Dank erteilen,
Welt, gute Nacht
Es ist vollbracht!

5. Jesu, deine Passion

¹⁸A stanza of “O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden.”

²¹The poet used this same conceit in his libretto for Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, which speaks in movement 65 of burying Jesus in the believer’s heart.

²²“Immerhin” is used here in one of its older-German senses as a synonym for “immer weiter” in its sense of “ever” or “again and again.” This older usage was still found in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, e.g., in Revelation 22:11, “Wer böse ist, der sei immerhin böse, und wer unrein ist, der sei immerhin unrein; aber wer fromm ist, der sei immerhin fromm, und wer heilig ist, der sei immerhin heilig” (“Whoever is evil, let him be ever evil, and whoever is filthy, let him be ever filthy; but whoever is devout, let him be ever devout, and whoever is holy, let him be ever holy”).

²³The Lutheranism of Bach’s day made a distinction between a “vernünftige Wollust” (“reasonable pleasure”) that is of God and a “verderbte Wollust” (“corrupted pleasure”) that is of the world.

²⁴Psalm 80:5 laments that God gives his people “bread of tears” to eat, and “tears” to drink.

²⁵“Es ist vollbracht” is a quotation of Jesus’s last words on the cross, as they are rendered in Luther’s translation of John 19:30. Luther’s wording is often given in English as “It is finished.” But Luther’s German is more emphatic than this, suggesting the stronger rendering “It is accomplished”; the declaration “Es ist vollbracht” connotes not simply “It [the earthly mission of Jesus to bring eternal life to those who believe in him] has been brought to its conclusion” but, more forcefully, “It has been brought to its fullness.”

²⁶The word “alle” is used here in its colloquial sense of “zu Ende, aus, aufgebraucht” (“over, finished, used up”); i.e., “Das Leid ist alle” does not mean “suffering/sorrow is all [that there is]” or “suffering/sorrow is all [that is needed].”

²⁷“Gerecht machen” (literally, “to make righteous”; Lutheran-theologically, however, “to justify”) was Luther’s expression for what he understood to be God’s imputing of Jesus’s righteousness to inherently sin-stained humans via the unmerited gift of faith that alone “justifies” them in God’s sight for eternal salvation.

You will find your grave in me [in my heart].²¹
In my arms and bosom.

3. I will now,
My Jesus, grieve over you
In my [little] corner;
The world may again and again²²
Partake of pleasure’s poison;²³
[But] I [ever] refresh myself in [the drinking of] my tears,²⁴
And will not
Long for any joy
Before [the time when] my countenance
Will look upon you in glory,
Before, through you, I am redeemed;
There [in heaven] I will restore myself with you.

4. It is accomplished;²⁵
The suffering [of Jesus on the cross] is over;²⁶
In God we are [by faith] justified [for salvation]²⁷
From our fall into sin [through Adam and Eve].
It is accomplished;
Now I will hurry
And give thanks to my Jesus;
World, good night;
It is accomplished.

5. Jesus, your Passion

**Ist mir lauter Freude,
Deine Wunden, Kron und Hohn
Meines Herzens Weide;
Meine Seel auf Rosen geht,
Wenn ich dran gedenke,
In dem Himmel eine Stätt,
Mir deswegen schenke.²⁸**

Christian Friedrich Henrici (Picander)

**Is pure joy to me;
Your wounds, crown [of thorns],²⁹ and scorn
[Are] my heart's pasture;
My soul walks on roses
When I reflect on it [your Passion];
Grant me a place in heaven
Because of it.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



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²⁸A stanza of “Jesu, Leiden, Pein und Tod.”

²⁹This “crown” refers to the agonizing “crown of thorns” that Jesus wears at his crucifixion (Matthew 27:29, Mark 15:17, John 19:2).