

“Jesu, meine Freude” BWV 227

1. **Jesu, meine Freude,  
Meines Herzens Weide,  
Jesu, meine Zier,  
Ach wie lang, ach lange  
Ist dem Herzen bange  
Und verlangt nach dir!  
Gottes Lamm, mein Bräutigam,  
Ausser dir soll mir auf Erden  
Nichts sonst Liebbers werden.<sup>1</sup>**

2. *Es<sup>2</sup> ist nun nichts Verdammliches an denen, die in Christo Jesu sind, die nicht nach dem Fleische wandeln, sondern nach dem Geist.<sup>3</sup>*

3. **Unter deinem Schirmen  
Bin ich vor den Stürmen  
Aller Feinde frei.  
Lass den Satan wittern,  
Lass den Feind erbittern,  
Mir steht Jesus bei.  
Ob es itzt gleich kracht und blitzt,  
Ob gleich Sünd und Hölle schrecken:**

1. **Jesus, my joy,  
My heart's pasture,  
Jesus, my adornment,  
Ah, how long, ah, long  
My heart is anxious,  
And longs for you.  
Lamb of God, my bridegroom,  
Besides you, nothing else on earth  
Shall be more dear to me.**

2. *There is now [with the gospel of salvation] nothing [eternally] condemnably against those who are in Christ Jesus,<sup>4</sup> who walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit.*

3. **Under your protection  
I am free from the assaults  
Of all enemies.  
Let Satan bluster,<sup>5</sup>  
Let the enemy provoke;<sup>6</sup>  
Jesus stands by me.  
Should [thunder and lightning] right now crack and flash,  
Should sin and hell right now terrorize,**

<sup>1</sup>All six stanzas of this hymn.

<sup>2</sup>In the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, this reads “*So ist nun nichts Verdammliches an denen, die in Christo Jesu sind*” (“*Therefore now [with the gospel of salvation, there] is nothing [eternally] condemnably against those who are in Christ Jesus*”).

<sup>3</sup>This is the exceptional reading of Romans 8:1 in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day and some other early Bibles. The second half of Luther's verse (“*die nicht nach dem Fleische wandeln, sondern nach dem Geist*”) is not found in the earliest sources of the original Greek text of Romans. The phrase is generally considered to have been inserted here by an early medieval scribe who copied the wording verbatim from the second half of Romans 8:4. Thus the phrase appears in most modern Bibles only at verse 4. (No Bibles feature it only at verse 1; the King James Bible and its Protestant English predecessors have it at verses 1 and 4, whereas early Catholic English Bibles give the whole phrase at verse 4 and only its first half at verse 1.) Luther translated the Greek phrase one way in his verse 1 and then provided a slightly different rendering in verse 4.

<sup>4</sup>The Olearius study Bible (which Bach, too, owned) says at Romans 8:1 that the sense of the expression “those who are *in* Christ Jesus” is explained in John 15:1-4, “*Ich bin ein rechter Weinstock ... Bleibet in mir, und ich in euch; gleich wie der Rebe kann keine Frucht bringen von ihm selber, er bleibe denn am Weinstock, also auch ihr nicht, ihr bleibet denn in mir*” (“*I [Jesus] am a proper vine ... [I say to you believers:] Remain in me, and I in you; just as the twig cannot bear fruit by itself unless it [the twig] remain on the vine, so neither can you [bear the spiritual fruit of salvation] unless you remain in me [via faith]*”).

<sup>5</sup>“*Wittern*” is used here not in its sense of “to sniff [the air, for the scent of prey],” but in its older German sense as a synonym for “*toben*” in the sense of “to bluster.”

<sup>6</sup>“*Erbittern*” is apparently used here in its sense of “*erzürnen*” (“to [provoke to] anger”). A contemporary German-English dictionary lists a variety of meanings: “*Erbittern (einen)*; to imbitter, exasperate, incense or provoke one; to put him in a bitter, crabbed or angry temper.”

**Jesus will mich decken.**

4. *Denn das Gesetz des Geistes, der da lebendig macht in Christo Jesu, hat mich frei gemacht von dem Gesetz der Sünde und des Todes.*<sup>8</sup>

**5. Trotz dem alten Drachen,  
Trotz des Todes Rachen,  
Trotz der Furcht darzu!  
Tobe, Welt, und springe,  
Ich steh hier und singe  
In gar sichrer Ruh.  
Gottes Macht hält mich in acht;  
Erd und Abgrund muss verstummen,  
Ob sie noch so brummen.**

6. *Ihr aber seid nicht fleischlich, sondern geistlich, so anders Gottes Geist in euch wohnt. Wer aber Christi Geist nicht hat, der ist nicht sein.*<sup>14</sup>

**Jesus will cover me [with his protective wings].<sup>7</sup>**

4. *For the law of the [Holy] Spirit who makes [believers] alive in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and of death.*<sup>9</sup>

**5. Defy [Satan,] the ancient dragon;<sup>10</sup>  
Defy Death's maw;<sup>11</sup>  
Defy the fear of them.  
Rant, world, and spring [into a rage];<sup>12</sup>  
I stand here and sing  
In utterly secure peace.  
God's power holds me in mind [by faith for salvation];<sup>13</sup>  
Earth and abyss must fall silent,  
However much they rumble.**

6. *You [believers in Christ], though, are not fleshly-minded but spiritually-minded,<sup>15</sup> if it be that God's spirit dwells in you. Whoever, though, does not have Christ's spirit, he [that person] is not his [God's/Christ's].*

<sup>7</sup>The language of the last two lines is derived from Psalm 91:4-5, “Er wird dich mit seinen Fittichen decken ... dass du nicht erschrecken müssest” (“He [the LORD] will cover you with his pinions ... so that you do not have to be terrified”).

<sup>8</sup>Romans 8:2.

<sup>9</sup>The understanding here was that the Holy Spirit gives life to the follower of Christ by inscribing the nonverbal law of grace upon the believer's heart; this is taken to work against “the law of sin and of death,” traditionally associated with Judaism.

<sup>10</sup>A conflation. Satan is called “die alte Schlange” (“the ancient serpent”—with echoes of Genesis 3:1-7) and “der grosse Drache” (“the great dragon”) in Revelation 12:9.

<sup>11</sup>“Der Todes Rachen” (or “der Todesrachen”) does not mean “the vengeance of death” or “death's revenge.” It is a synonym for “Todesschlund,” the “maw [of the figure] of Death.” In English, this expression is used, e.g., in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, where Eve declares to Adam the following about the figure or personification of Death: “... so Death / Shall ... with us two / Be forced to satisfy his ravenous maw.”

<sup>12</sup>This line does not mean “Rage, world, and leap [or, ‘pounce,’ i.e., in attack] upon me.” One was evidently expected to understand the text as: “tobe, Welt, und springe vor Zorn.” That common German expression—“vor Zorn springen”—is parallel in construction to the even more common expression “vor Freude springen” (“to jump for joy”). English would more idiomatically say “fly into a rage” (not “jump for rage”).

<sup>13</sup>The sense of this line is derived from 1 Peter 1:5, “... die ihr aus Gottes Macht durch den Glauben bewahrt werdet zur Seligkeit” (“[to you followers of Christ,] you who out of God's power through faith are safeguarded for [eternal] salvation”).

<sup>14</sup>Romans 8:9.

<sup>15</sup>It might seem that the sense of Luther's German here is “You are not fleshly but spiritual” (i.e., for believers in Christ, the essential “you,” in the sight of God, is not what is made up of flesh but of spirit). The literal rendering of the original Greek text of this passage is “You are not *in* [the] flesh but *in* [the] spirit,” which in German would be “Ihr seid nicht im Fleisch, sondern im Geist.” Luther slightly adapted this to “Ihr seid nicht fleischlich, sondern geistlich,” presumably because this somewhat more clearly projects that the sense of this passage is “You are not *of* the flesh but *of* the spirit”—asserting that Christians would be going about their lives wrongly if they focus on physicality (pleasure, and so on) rather than on spiritual matters.

**7. Weg mit allen Schätzen!  
Du bist mein Ergötzen,  
Jesu, meine Lust!  
Weg ihr eitlen Ehren,  
Ich mag euch nicht hören,  
Bleibt mir unbewusst!  
Elend, Not, Kreuz, Schmach und Tod  
Soll mich, ob ich viel muss leiden,  
Nicht von Jesu scheiden.**

**7. Away with all treasures;  
You are my delectation,  
Jesus, my delight.  
Away, you vain honors,  
I do not want to listen to you;  
Remain unknown to me.  
Misery, distress, cross-bearing,<sup>16</sup> humiliation, and death  
Shall not, however much I must suffer,  
Separate me from Jesus.**

*8. So aber Christus in euch ist, so ist der Leib zwar tot um der Sünde willen; der Geist aber ist das Leben um der Gerechtigkeit willen.<sup>17</sup>*

*8. If, though, Christ is in you, then the body is indeed dead<sup>18</sup> on account<sup>19</sup> of sin; the [believers'] spirit,<sup>20</sup> though, is [imperishable] life on account of the righteousness [of Christ, imputed to believers].*

**9. Gute Nacht, o Wesen,  
Das die Welt erlesen,  
Mir gefällt du nicht.  
Gute Nacht, ihr Sünden,  
Bleibet weit dahinten,  
Kommt nicht mehr ans Licht!  
Gute Nacht, du Stolz und Pracht!**

**9. Good night, oh [corrupted] essence  
That the world has chosen;<sup>21</sup>  
You do not please me.  
Good night, you sins;  
Remain far behind;  
Come no more into the light.<sup>22</sup>  
Good night, you pride and splendor;**

<sup>16</sup>“Kreuz” here means the suffering of metaphorically bearing and enduring the cross, as Jesus did literally. In the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, Jesus says in Luke 14:27, “Wer nicht sein Kreuz trägt und mir nachfolget, der kann nicht mein Jünger sein” (“Whoever does not bear his cross and follow me, he cannot be my disciple”).

<sup>17</sup>Romans 8:10.

<sup>18</sup>“Ist der Leib zwar tot um der Sünde willen” does not mean “the body is indeed dead to sin.”

<sup>19</sup>In modern German, “um [jemandens / einer Sache] willen” is used as a synonym for “zuliebe” (“for the sake of [someone / something].” In older German though, as here, this construction was used as a synonym for “wegen” (“on account of” or “because of”), even though this usage was frowned upon by strict grammarians in the eighteenth century.

<sup>20</sup>The Greek word “pneuma” in the New Testament that Luther rendered as “Geist” was understood by Lutheran interpreters as referring in this passage not to God the Holy Spirit, but to the spirit of a human being (i.e., to the person’s immortal part that is recovered, renewed, and imbued with imperishable life under the gospel of Christ). The original Greek text does not have a verb here, and so many translators have read its “tó pneuma zoé” as “the [Holy] Spirit [gives] life,” whereas others, including Luther, have taken it to mean “the [believer’s] spirit [is] life.”

<sup>21</sup>Lines 1–2 do not mean “Farewell, O you / Who have chosen the world.” The verb “erlesen” here (“Das die Welt *erlesen* [*hat*]”) is indeed past tense, however, as the present tense would require “Das die Welt *erliest*.” “Die Welt” is the subject of the verb “erlesen,” and “Wesen” is the object. “Wesen” means “essence,” but it would not make theological sense to say that the world has chosen its primeval essence. “Wesen” here, in connection with “die Welt,” more likely refers to the changed essence of the “world” after the fall of humanity into sin, such that human nature and thus “the world” have become essentially corrupted. According to traditional Christian doctrine, only God can restore humanity and the world to the perfect condition that prevailed before humanity’s fall into sin. This understanding about the essence of “the world” is reflected in Luther’s rendering of 1 Corinthians 7:31, “Denn das Wesen dieser Welt vergeht” (“Because [with the coming of God’s messiah, Jesus,] the [corrupted] essence of this world is fading away”).

<sup>22</sup>The idea here is that one’s sinfulness should not come forth “into the light” by manifesting itself in actual evil deeds; this language is derived from John 3:20, “Wer Arges tut, der ... kommt nicht an das Licht, auf dass seine Werk nicht gestraft werden” (“Whoever does bad, he ... comes not into the light, so that his works will not be [exposed and hence] punished”).

**Dir sei ganz, du Lasterleben,  
Gute Nacht gegeben.**

10. *So nun der Geist des, der Jesum von den Toten auferwecket hat, in euch wohnet, so wird auch derselbige, der Christum von den Toten auferwecket hat, eure sterbliche Leiber lebendig machen um des willen, dass sein Geist in euch wohnet.*<sup>23</sup>

**11. Weicht, ihr Trauergeister,  
Denn mein Freudenmeister,  
Jesus, tritt herein.  
Denen, die Gott lieben,  
Muss auch ihr Betrüben  
Lauter Zucker sein.  
Duld ich schon hier Spott und Hohn,  
Dennoch bleibst du auch im Leide,  
Jesu, meine Freude.**

**To you, you life of vice, be altogether  
Bid good night.**

10. *If now the spirit of him [God] who has raised Jesus up from the dead dwells in you, then this same one who has raised Christ up from the dead will make your mortal bodies alive, on account<sup>24</sup> of the fact that his spirit dwells in you.*

**11. Make way, you [evil] spirits [instigators] of  
mourning,<sup>25</sup>  
Because my joymaster,<sup>26</sup>  
Jesus, steps in [to our midst].<sup>27</sup>  
To those who love God,  
Even their grieving  
Has to be pure [healing/sweetening] sugar.<sup>28</sup>  
If, yes, here [on earth] I endure scorn and derision,  
Nonetheless, even in [my] suffering you remain,  
Jesus, my joy.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)

<sup>23</sup>Romans 8:11.

<sup>24</sup>Regarding “um ... willen,” see fn. 19, above. The Tyndale Bible of 1534, copying Luther’s syntax, renders this verse as “[God] shall quicken your mortal bodies, *because that* this spirit dwelleth in you.”

<sup>25</sup>“Ihr Trauergeister” does not mean “you constituent spirits—i.e., neither ‘you life forces,’ nor ‘you emotional states’—of persons who are sad, mournful, or grieving.” A “Trauergeist” is a demon, an external “evil spirit,” who “possesses” people and, by means of this invasion, robs them of their joy. Satan was often called “der höllische Trauergeist (“the hellish spirit [who is an instigator] of [people’s] mourning”).

<sup>26</sup>The term “Freudenmeister” (“joymaster”) appears to have been coined by the writer of this hymn. Jesus as the gospel’s “joymaster” is presumably meant to be understood in contrast with Moses as the law’s “taskmaster,” in accordance with Luther’s understanding of Galatians 3:24-25. That passage declares, in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, “Also ist das Gesetz unser Zuchtmeister gewesen auf Christum, dass wir durch den Glauben gerecht würden; nun aber der Glaube gekommen ist, sind wir nicht mehr unter dem Zuchtmeister” (“Therefore the law [of Moses] has been our taskmaster [leading] toward [the time when] Christ [came] so that we would be justified by faith [in God’s messiah, Jesus]; now, though, [that] the faith [i.e., in Christ, the ‘joymaster’] has come, we are no longer under [the dismal power of] the taskmaster”).

<sup>27</sup>Presumably alluding to the Luther Bible’s rendering of the narrative in John 20:19-20, where the thought-to-be-dead but now-risen Jesus suddenly “trat mitten ein” (“stepped into the midst”) of his terrified disciples, who “da wurden froh, dass sie den Herrn sahen” (“then were glad because they [now] saw the Lord [again]”).

<sup>28</sup>At the time that the text of this hymn was composed (the mid-seventeenth century), sugar continued to be valued primarily as a curative and only secondarily as a sweetener, but most probably both of these purposes played simultaneously into the reference here in line 6 to “Zucker.” Contemporaries of the hymnist quipped that “Ein Mann ohne Geld ist gleich wie ein Apotheker ohne Zucker” (“A man without money is just like a pharmacist without sugar”); several similar adages were current in Bach’s day. Before the nineteenth century, sugar was a great luxury, and in much earlier times it had been used only as a medicine, before eventually being used, by the wealthy, also as a sweetener. (Regular folk used honey for sweetening, not sugar.) Today’s German hymnbooks, apparently embarrassed by the “Zucker” in this stanza, have given up the poet’s gustatorial-medical nuances and silently changed his text to “Denen, die Gott lieben, / Muss auch ihr Betrüben / Lauter Freude sein” (“To those who love God, / Even their grieving / Has to be pure joy”).



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