

# When the Roll is Called Devotional

Page 5 in **Hymns of Our Redeemer**  
James M. Black, 1856-1938

Hi! My name is \_\_\_\_\_. In this devotional, we are focused on the classic hymn, "**When the Roll is Called.**" It was written and published by James Black in 1893. He was an American composer of hymns, a choir leader and Sunday school teacher who lived in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Over the years this song has held a place among some of the most famous Christian hymns.

The story is told that one Sunday, while calling the roll of his Sunday School class, James Black noticed one of his regular students was absent. Later he visited her home to see how she was and found her suffering with pneumonia, an often fatal illness in those days. Shortly thereafter she passed away. As Mr. Black reflected on the loss of this precious child and her absence at roll call, he thought of the roll call in heaven one day. Passages like Hebrews 12:23 came to his mind which speaks of "...the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven,..." and Revelation 21:27: "...they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." It is said that our author looked for a hymn that addressed this "roll call in heaven" and found none, so he wrote "**When the Roll is Called.**"\*

This well-known anthem of our faith points to the ultimate goal of our Christian hope: one day each of God's children will realize eternal life in the realms of Glory, where we will join the blessed throng in Heaven, basking in the presence of our loving Redeemer, Jesus Christ!

Let us sing together this classic song of hope and joy. And, as we sing, may we remind ourselves of the wonderful promise of Heaven we enjoy by the mercy and grace of our God!

\* From: <https://christianmusicandhymns.com/2019/09/when-roll-is-called-up-yonder-hymn-story.html>

## When the Roll is Called

James M. Black

1. When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound,  
And time shall be no more,  
And the morning breaks eternal, bright and fair;  
When the saved of earth shall gather  
Over on the other shore,  
And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.
2. Let us labor for the Master from  
The dawn 'til setting sun,  
Let us talk of all His wondrous love and care;  
Then when all of life is over and  
Our work on earth is done,  
And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.

Chorus:

When the roll is called up yonder,  
When the roll is called up yonder,  
When the roll is called up yonder,  
When the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.

### Thoughts on the Scriptures:

**"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16**

Dear friends, we would do well to consider what we mean when we say we "believe in" Jesus Christ. The Holy Scriptures give us wonderful news about a child that was born to a young girl who had never known physical relations with a man. God the Holy Spirit conceived in her womb His divine, only begotten Son. God the Son, Jesus the Messiah, came from eternity into time to show us who the Father in heaven is, and how much He loves us. In the festivities of the season, all Christendom gleams in celebration of the advent of Emmanuel, "God with us." I know most of you have basked in the glow of the Good News of the birth of Christ Jesus just about all your life!

Yes, God the Father came into our fallen world in the person of Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. Holy Scripture demands that we believe in Him...that

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we believe the record of His marvelous ministry of compassion and truth and miracles and sacrifice on the Cross and that He, Jesus, was the only way, the only truth, the only life, the only access to Father God Almighty! (John 14:6) Scriptures like John 3:16 document for all who would believe that by that faith in Jesus we may have the wonderful hope of eternal life, supernatural everlasting life in which we will bask in God's presence with the joyful throng of fellow believers forever!

So the ultimate question stands for all of us: Do we believe in Jesus Christ? Not, are we perfect? Not, do we help the poor and needy? Not, do we sing in the choir, teach Sunday School, or visit the sick? These things are all worthy ministries the like of which Christian believers should be doing. But, the simple, real question remains: In all our doing, in all our religious activity or lack thereof, in all our struggles in life, in the face of all our questions and faults and failures...do we believe in Jesus Christ?...the only begotten Son of God, Who came to save us from our hopeless, sinful state. (Matthew 1:21) Do we believe in Jesus, Who came to save us from the destiny of eternal death!

Let me put it another way. As followers of Christ, as those counted among Christian believers, we believe that our Heavenly Father gave us His only begotten Son to live among us, to love us where we are, to die for us and to rise from that death by the power of the Holy Spirit...the same Holy Spirit that lives in our hearts today...by faith! (Romans 6:10-11, 8:11)

Oh, dear Brother, dear Sister, see how precious a gift our gracious God pours upon us as we take our eyes off our unworthiness and focus our faith on the priceless love of God toward us through Jesus Christ!

**"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14: 2-3**

These are the words of Jesus that He spoke to His disciples. These same words are also for us today! Believing in Jesus means we take Him at His word. As surely as He meant what He said to His disciples just before He was crucified, He meant it for us too! He did not die just for a handful of believers 2000 years ago, He died to take away the sins of the whole world...for ALL who believe in Him! (John 17: 21-24)

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He did die in our place to pay the penalty for OUR sins! He did rise from death in victory! He did ascend back to Heaven! He is coming back to take His children who believe in Him to be with Him forever!

We have heard sermons about it. We have sung songs about it. We have read about it in Holy Scripture for years and years. We have always said we believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is true for many of you...but now your profession of faith is being tested as you never dreamed possible!

Let me encourage you. You have not believed in vain. Your hope in Christ will not disappoint you. DO NOT GIVE UP NOW, HAVING COME SO FAR BY FAITH!

**Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2**

May we run with patience, with perseverance, with endurance, with FAITHFULNESS in this struggle we now find ourselves facing! Let us focus not on the pain and suffering of our present distresses. NO! Let us focus on the promise that we will see our precious Savior in person in heaven one day soon!

Remember John 3:16! This mortal life is not all there is! There is a better world coming for YOU! Keep your eyes on the promise: everlasting, eternal LIFE in the presence of our Redeemer and all our brothers and sisters who have traveled in victory the same road of faith we are on now!

**The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall we ever be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**

**Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52**

## **A Closing Prayer**

**Let us Pray. - *Dear Father in Heaven, how we marvel at Your priceless gift of eternal life. We have so many questions, so many challenges to our believing in Your promise. But we come to You, believing You keep Your word. We believe that our Savior, Jesus Christ, is Your Son and He is our Brother too! We ask You, humbly to strengthen us as we walk here in this world of pain and sorrow. For we long, we wait as patiently as we can, to see You one day. What a glorious day that will be...to look full in your wonderful face...to see our loved ones again who died in the arms of faith in Jesus. Oh, grant us endurance! Grant us a fresh revelation of the truth of Your Word, Your promise to us of eternal life! This we pray in the name of Your Son, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen***