

# *Your Story in His Story*

**The 2015 Evangelicals Concerned Autumn Weekend in Ocean Grove**

**October 9 – 11, 2015 Thornley Chapel**

**Commemorating the Centennials of Anna Bartlett Warner, Fanny Jane Crosby,**

**William Howard Doane and Booker T. Washington**

**Including Three Teachings by Dr. Ralph Blair**

**“The Bible Tells Me So”, “This is My Story” and “To God be the Glory”**

## **“This is My Story”**

Ever hear someone ask sarcastically, “What’s *his* story?” Ever hear *yourself* ask, “What’s *her* story?” The questioner smirks and rolls the eyes while putting the question to someone *from whom* a smirk and a roll of the eyes is sought and, calculatingly, assured. And it’s all done out of the questioner’s need for reassurance.

But, of course, it’s not really a question, is it? It’s a *rhetorical* question, so, it’s a statement. And it’s a statement in search of *affirmation* and *reassurance*, so it has to be asked again and again – for seeking affirmation and reassurance *that* way never works. It’s put *by* someone who’s insecure enough to ask the “question” and it’s put *to* someone who’s insecure enough to give the affirming response that’s expected. It’s put *by* someone who’s seeking affirmation and reassurance, *to* someone who’s seeking affirmation and reassurance.

Now, there’s no chance for any real affirmation and reassurance from another who’s desperate for affirmation and reassurance. From *his* insecurity he’ll tell you whatever he knows darn well will work for him – for *his* best interest. So, how can one’s insecurity, plus another’s insecurity, add up to security for either person?

And, it gets still more troubling. The more anxiously insecure one *thinks* she is, the more danger she is to herself and to others. She attempts to overpower her anxiety with hostility but hostility isn’t up to the task. How so?

A person is anxious because he thinks he’s in *danger*. Whether or not he’s *really* in danger doesn’t matter to anxiety if he’s *telling* himself he’s in danger. But his hostility, meant to quell his anxiety, may actually invite an actually dangerous response from another whose sense of danger, from him, now prompts the hostility of *his* retaliation. Now he may sense even more insecurity and so, more ideas of danger and so, more anxiety, as well as now he might, in the presence of the *real* danger he’s brought on himself through his supposed remedy of hostility. So he escalates hostility.

Smirks and eye rolls are intended to bring reassurance of safety, but they betray the seekers and fuel the anxiety that prompted them. And each person senses something of what he’s doing as each one tries to escape the insecurity of his own shaky story about his own sensed flaws.

Meanwhile, our smirks and eyeball rolls about others, fail to address *our own* narcissistic notions that *we* don’t measure up. And, of course, it’s *our* judgments against ourselves that are distracting *us*, for what we really do think and worry about is what we

buy into. And, too, our own smirks and eyeball rolls suggest that we are the objects of others' smirks and eyeball rolls.

As long as *that* sort of assurance of safety is our aim and nothing more effective than *denial* and *denigration* of others is our game, our attention is stuck in our narcissism that's, itself, of course, the trap. We can't let go of our self-obsessing stories about our self-assessed flaws, even though our *self-absorption* is exactly what we really *need to be freed from*.

And trying to find faults in others does zilch to resolve *any flaw* we, ourselves, find in ourselves. We fall all over *our own felt flaws* and that's not anyone's fault but ours.

Of course, others, too, feel anxious about *their* self-absorbing flaws and they can and do trip over them just as we fear and trip over ours. Since we don't and can't see others as they see themselves, but we do see us as we see ourselves, we easily conclude, naively, that when our own self-doubts get *our* attention, they get the attention of the others as well. That's nonsense! But, not grasping that it's nonsense, we get ourselves even more anxious. They distract themselves with their self-doubts as we distract ourselves with ours; they don't distract themselves with ours and we don't distract ourselves with theirs.

Obsessed with their own self-doubts, they couldn't care less about ours, even if we tried to tell them all about our anxious self-doubts. Who has time to listen to another's self-doubts when one is so fretfully fixated on one's own self-doubts? If we'd wake up to the nonsense of our fixation over us, and listen a little bit better to them, we'd discover that we're not alone in the mess we make for ourselves any more than they're alone in the mess they make for themselves. Maybe, then, we'd be able to be a bit more empathic, a bit more open to living the Golden Rule. But don't count on cessation of self-centered anxieties over what gets only one's own obsessive attention without trying to listen more *realistically*, more *rationally*, to others as well as to oneself.

Meanwhile, we're not tending to what *our real flaw* is, the *fault* that keeps us stuck in flaws of our own imagination, the deadly *fault* that kills us. In all the nonsense, self-servingly distracted by our own self-centered *flaws*, we're arrogantly passing right over our own *fatal faults*. We're preoccupied with our narrow-minded focus, so we don't, we can't, we think we dare not, see beyond it. We're so preoccupied with our shallow focus on surfaces that we don't, we can't, we think we dare not, see deeper.

We try distracting ourselves with what we say are *their* faults, magnifying even *their flaws*, but all of this only reinforces what prompts our efforts at distraction in the first place: our own disappointing sense of self, our own fatal fault.

Ever hear a sarcastic: "What's *your* story?" Not so much. *That* question, put *that* way, can't count on a responding smirk and eye roll of camaraderie, can it. A likelier rejoinder would be a defensively aggressive: "You got a problem?" – or something far worse.

Actually, each of us has *two* distracting *stories* of self and we're anxiously aware of *each* of them. *One* is the story we all fabricate for *public* consumption, our *postured* self. We can no more buy into *our* pretense and padded resumes for public consumption than anyone else can buy into his or hers. But, we all leap from our own take on ours and conclude that nobody else will buy into ours. Of course, there again, we're merely buying into *our* not buying it, for we're who put it together to make ourselves look better. Better than what? Better than *our own version* of self.

That's our other distracting story of self. We *do* buy into this story since it's the story we *experience* from inside our own heads and therefore, it's who we think we really are.

It falls far short of the story of the “self” of our fantasies, far short of the story of the public presentation we posture. And again, we irrationally suppose that *others* see our own story of ourselves. Of course, they don’t. They can’t. Our version of ourselves is locked inside our heads. And, of course, it’s this story that prompts our pretended story.

Our version of ourselves seems to take up so much space in our heads that, even among those of you who have heard some of this in psychotherapy with me, your version of yourself is constantly pushing aside what you know, *rationally*, to be the case.

Our publicly postured story *nervously struts* the stage since a fake can’t forget it’s a fake. Our other story, the story of self we experience, *anxiously hides* backstage, mumbling its script to itself. But *between those lines* of the performance on stage and *what’s in the mumbling* backstage, the story’s the same. It’s all about how we’re not as *bright* or as *attractive* or as *popular* as we want to be, we don’t have *enough* of what we think we *need* to have. It’s all our story of what we *might* have been *if only*, what we *could* have been, if only. It’s our fantasy story of *needing* to be the envied idol of fantasy. And yet, it *never satisfies*, since it is, after all, a fantasy of an otherwise scenario and a fantasy is an idol and an idol is a fake.

But things can seem even worse. We think that the others have access to both of our stories, that they see right through our charade on stage and they’re listening in to our backstage mumblings.

Actually, they’re focused on *neither* of our stories. But they can’t help reading *into* whatever *they think* is our story. What *they’re reading*, though, is what *they write*. So, there are as many stories of us as there are people writing *their* stories of us. But, you know, their stories of us are no bestsellers, for only the authors read them. And even the authors don’t have time to write much more than a word or two. They’re too distracted by their own troubling story of self and their own fantasy stories.

We think everyone’s reading what we’re reading, which is what we’re writing, but it’s also no bestseller. We’re the only ones who can bother to read what we write about us. Who else gives a damn? And, you know, we’ve read what we write so often we’ve memorized every page and every effort at revision and we’re still unsatisfied.

So, is there any really true story about any of us? Are all stories simply self-centered figments of defensiveness and daydreams of envy?

Thank God, there *is* a *true* story, and it’s the *only* story that really matters. It’s from an entirely different point of view. It’s a *whole, other* story from a *Whole Other World*.

It’s the story that inspired Fanny Crosby to write: “*This is my story!*” And she magnified her joyous testimony by adding, “*This is my song!*”

Instead of distracting herself with what *she* thought of herself and what *she* thought about what others may have thought of her, or what others said they thought of her – and all of that included ignorance, caricature, jealousy, envy, pity, appreciation, friendship, affection, love – she praised her *Savior* for her *true* story. And, she said, she praised him for it, all the daylong.

*Her real* story was really her *Savior’s* story! Her *true story* was her *Savior’s own story of her*, born in *His* story, *borne* by Him from before the creation of the world, borne by him on the cross. He knew who she was, with all her shortcomings and all her God-given talents and all her sins which he took into himself on the cross and, there, atoned for her falling short of *the glory of God* – something far, far more serious than falling short of a fantasy self or someone else’s opinion. So, this story, known by her *Savior*, brought from

death into life by her Savior, was her *song!* What Fanny called *her* story was the *blessed assurance* that she found in response to *His* eternal story of love.

*Her* story in *His* story set her troubled mind and heart at rest. His story put her story of herself in the perspective of redemptive history and gave her “blessed assurance” in Him. In His story she was “heir of salvation”, the “purchase of God”, she was “born of His Spirit” and now, forever, she was “lost in His love.” Blessed assurance, indeed!

So, it’s no wonder she sang, “*This is my story; this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long!*”

As we said, it was in the great music room of the grand Knapp mansion in Brooklyn that Fanny first heard the tune for which she immediately wrote the words of, “Blessed Assurance!”. That mansion evidenced the success of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company’s provision of protection and security against loss.

But there are losses that no insurance or assurance company can prevent or reverse. Besides, these insurance policies depend on our investing our money up front to keep our policies current. And, of course, the policies spell out conditions and exceptions in fine print – not for our protection but for the company’s benefit.

Fanny enjoyed her friends and supporters who, besides sharing her faith, supported her financially, among them, Joseph Knapp, founder of MetLife. But she was in *utter joy*, knowing the Founder of life, the Founder of her life, Life Himself, Eternal Source of blessed assurance that was all of grace, without any merit of hers or ours and without any fine print conditions, exceptions or limitations on grace.

“What’s *my* story?”, can be a question fraught with much anxiety. “Who am *I?*” What does *my* story have in store for *me?* Fantasies of the future can be frightening. It’s always and only fantasies of the *future* that we fear. Nobody fears the past, except in terms of its impact on the future.

We read in the second letter to Timothy: “A spirit of fear is not what God has given us. Rather, God has given us a spirit of power and love and self-control.” (II Tim 1:7). Jesus warned his followers: “Don’t be afraid of those who can kill only your body but cannot kill you, yourself, your spirit. Instead, fear your utter annihilation.” (Matt 10:28).

Fanny Crosby was trusting that, no matter what there may have been in her past, it was not something that would be her shame in the future. Though her sins “be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow”, were the lines from Isaiah that she put into poetry and believed with all her heart.

No matter what the immediate future brought, her ultimate future would be blessedly assured life with Jesus, her Savior and Lord. Her “blessed assurance” was, indeed, Jesus, himself. He’d be there in her future as he’d been with her every day of her Christian life.

So, she was “safe in the arms of Jesus, safe on his gentle breast”, now and forever. He was the One who *held* all the future in his *nail-scared hands*. This is why she wrote: “Jesus, keep me near the cross, there a precious fountain, free to all, a healing stream, flows from Calvary’s mountain. In the cross, in the cross, be my glory ever; till my raptured soul shall find rest beyond the river.”

The Apostle Paul was not unaware that there were painful circumstances in the days ahead for anyone who followed in his Savior’s steps in a pagan Empire aimed against his Savior and his Savior’s followers. Paul’s own pious zealotry of earlier years had meant death for Jesus’ first followers. Now he knew full well, his conversion to Christ and service to him could mean his own death.

Paul's perspective on his experience in *pre-Christian* Rome must be our perspective in the rapidly evolving *post-Christian* West. Of course, no nation, including ours, has ever been a really "Christian nation" and some reasons for having so labeled any country, including our own, are far from good *Christian* reasons. Of the reign of God that Jesus inaugurated, we're to continue to pray: "Thy Kingdom come . . . on earth as in Heaven." God's reign is future. That tense we so naturally fear will be supernaturally His realm and reign of Love.

When we finally find Paul, he's in prison in Rome, and knows very well what could be his fate in *human* terms. There he is, around AD 60 or so, a little more than a quarter of a century after *he himself* persecuted Christians. He's writing to dear Christian friends at Philippi the most personal of his extant letters.

And, although imprisoned, he uses the words "joy" or "rejoice" fourteen times in this short letter. How can he *rejoice* in prison? He tells us plainly: "Being confident of this, that the One who began a good work in you [and in me] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Phil 1:6) He looks ahead in confidence to that conclusive "day of Christ Jesus", i.e., "Day of the Lord". (1:10, 2:16) There will be a *completion* of what God *began* in Jesus before the foundation of the world, and, in one way, *finished* at the cross (John 19:30) and then validated in Jesus' resurrection.

Paul quotes from an early Christian hymn to this effect, concluding with this great vision: "God exalted Jesus to the highest and gave him the name, the authority, above every name and authority, that at the name and authority of Jesus, every knee, everywhere, shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord to the glory of God the Father." (2:9-11)

No wonder Paul told these Christians at Philippi: "To me, *to live* is Christ, *to die* is gain." (1:21) While alive, we live each day in *Christ!* Dying is getting to know Christ *more intimately than we can imagine!*

Wasn't this the view of Fanny's own "Christ hymn", some 1800 years after that very early hymn that Paul cited? "Watching and waiting, looking above, filled with His goodness, lost in His love. Perfect submission, perfect delight, visions of rapture now burst on my sight; angels descending bring from above, echoes of mercy, whispers of love."

Is this *your* story? Is this *your* song? What's *your* story? Is *your* story, *His* story? What's *your* song? Is *your* song, *His*?

Do you sidestep the fiction of your "you" with the truth of Jesus' *real you in Him*? Are you stuck on what *you* think of you? Are you stuck on what *you* think others think of you? Or are you resting in *Him* who for *you* who are called, "the joy that was set before him", endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now seated at God's right hand? (Heb 12:2) He sees *you* through *His* eyes and is coming back for *you* for He's ordained *you as you are in Him*, to bring *you* to all He's always intended *you* to be?

Said John: "Dear friends, now we are God children, and what we will be has not yet been made known. Yet, we do know this, that when Christ appears, *we shall be like him*, for we shall see *him* as he *is*." (I John 3:2) Amen.