

The Lark Ascending



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A Place in the Wilderness

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Scripture quotations are from the
American Standard Version of the Bible (1901)
unless otherwise noted.

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The man sat, listening to the exquisite piece of classical music. Somehow, it seemed to lift him heavenward, out of his chair, as if such a thing were possible. It was written by the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams in the early twentieth century, and has become perhaps his most beloved work; it is certainly his most famous. It is called "The Lark Ascending," and its notes do bear out the title well.

The man had loved this composition ever since he first heard it, more than fifty years earlier. However, it was not until somewhat recently that he came to appreciate it in a more profound way.

Birding in Canada

He had been looking for a particular bird, called a Skylark, on Vancouver Island, off the west coast of Canada. The Skylark was a Eurasian species that had been introduced to the island some years earlier, and formed a colony there.

He went to a field the Skylarks were known to inhabit. It was springtime, so birds were performing their yearly mating rituals. The field was filled with birds of different species. Various kinds of sparrows were present, flitting through and over the field grass.

The Skylark is a small, nondescript brown bird. It bears no markings that would make it easy to distinguish from the many other birds inhabiting the field grass. Furthermore, the man was some distance away from the avian activity taking place, and was having difficulty determining which, if any, of the birds he was seeing were Skylarks.

Even with a high-powered spotting scope, he was not sure. A bird would perch on some grass, and he would swing the spotting scope toward the bird. However, by the time he focused the scope, the bird had moved. He thought some were Skylarks, but he wasn't sure.

The Flight of the Skylark

Then, a bird took off from the grass heading straight upward. It was not a forward flight heading upward, but a simple rising by its flapping wings. It was astounding to watch.

The bird flew higher and higher, and yet higher still, all the while simply rising vertically. The man

had never seen the like. The bird rose until it was out of sight, perhaps a thousand feet or more heavenward.

More astounding still was that the bird sang during its whole vertical ascent. It was a stunning display of power and might from that little creature.

A second bird took off in similar fashion. The man followed it with his binoculars until it reached its peak. Then it hovered, and moved about, all the while singing. It was a mesmerizing spectacle.

The bird's song was intricate and incredibly complex, impossible to mimic. That it could vocalize so strongly while it was exercising to rise heavenward was a testimony to the great strength these small birds had.

Vaughan Williams had been inspired to write *The Lark Ascending* by a poem of the same name, written by George Meredith in 1881. Since the Skylark is native to part of England as well as large parts of Europe and Asia, both Meredith and Vaughan Williams must have seen the larks display and composed according to what they saw. No doubt, Vaughan Williams was astounded and deeply moved by the Skylarks. How many times he viewed this marvelous display only the Lord knows.

Revelation

The man had gained a much deeper appreciation for the piece, having seen what the composer saw, and to some degree, felt what the composer must have felt. As the man sat and listened, he mused upon the ascent of the Skylark. Then, in a moment of extraordinary clarity, he saw something much deeper and far more profound. In a flash of revelation, he knew why God had created the Skylark in the way He had.

So many things in God's creation are pictures of spiritual realities, showing us persons, things, matters, and attributes that we could not otherwise apprehend. What then of the Skylark's ascent and song?

Christ's Ascension

The lark's ascent was a picture of *Christ's ascension*. Many of us have thought that Christ simply went to the Father in little more than an instant. But, there was something about this new revelation that was right, proper, and fitting. The man's spirit witnessed with the revelation. He was sure what he was seeing was so.

The Lord rose slowly, passing through all that was between Him and the Father. He passed through

the entire physical universe,¹ and must have passed through the myriads of angels that surrounded the throne of God.

Indeed, some of those angels—the evil ones—must have tried to deter Him, to in some way stop His ascent. They likely tried to distract Him, disturb Him, and inhibit His progress. But, the Lord Jesus rose steadily, seemingly unaware of or unmoved by these distractions.

All the while, as He ascended, He was singing—singing hymns of praise to the Father. He was praising the Father for all He had done in bringing the Lord Jesus through the great sufferings of His human life—especially on the cross—and through death and into resurrection. He was praising the Father for far more as well. Now, the Father was bringing Him to His very own throne.

The awe, majesty, beauty, and sweetness of that scene enveloped the man. Tears came to his eyes, as he “saw” the wonderful Jesus rising in song to join His divine Father.

¹ Heb. 4:14

A Gem of Great Price

The man pondered this marvelous sight for days. He had been given a very precious gem—one of inestimable worth. The man treasured it. He looked at it from one direction, then another. He examined facet after facet of the jewel he had been gifted.

Indeed, through the Father's eyes, this must have been, and must still be, an indescribably wonderful sight—the Lord ascending to Him in glory with a song upon His lips. He was the first of what was, in some manner of speaking, a new species: both God and man, both divine and human, both Creator and creature, yet somehow mysteriously one.

The Brothers of the Firstborn

The man considered this event and saw still more. If Jesus, the Firstborn of many brothers,¹ ascended in this manner to the Father, then what of His brothers at His coming?

¹ Rom. 8:29

It is true that at the last trumpet,¹ many Christians will be caught up by the angels² to the air³ to meet with the Lord. But that is not true of every believer. Some—perhaps a relatively small number—will be ready⁴ for the Lord's return. They will have sought Him above all things during their lives and given themselves totally to Him, to be prepared by Him for that day.

The Ascent of the Larks

When that day comes, some will be taken and some will be left.⁵ Those who are ready will go; those who are not will stay. When that moment comes, the Lord within the watchful believers will again ascend to the Father; this time He will bring these dear seekers with Him⁶ as He goes. He will come forth from within them⁷ and with them to ascend to the

¹ 1 Cor. 15:51–52; 1 Thes. 4:16

² Matt. 13:30, 39

³ 1 Thes. 4:17

⁴ Matt. 24:44

⁵ Matt. 24:40–41; Luke 17:34–35

⁶ Matt. 24:40–41 (Greek)

⁷ Col. 3:4

Father. They will be taken along by the wonderful, heavenly transport, the Lord Himself, the One who joins heaven to Earth.¹

Who can say how many there will be. From across the Earth, those believers accounted worthy² will ascend in glory to the Father, singing as they rise and shining like the sun.³ How precious this will be to God! How much has He endured over not simply millennia, but eons, for the sake of these, His many sons. As they come before Him, His joy and satisfaction will embrace them all.

A Proper Father

The Father hides His great suffering—His sorrow and grief over the pain and death of each of His creatures⁴—from His children. He makes no show of it. All who come to Him experience a joyous and peace-filled Being. A good father would always do this for the sake of his children's welfare. They could not bear the weight of what the father bears.

¹ Jn. 1:51

² Luke 21:36

³ Matt. 13:43

⁴ Matt. 10:29

However, as the children grow, they are slowly brought into the *fellowship* of their father's sufferings,¹ as their heart gains the capacity to bear such weight. So it is with the Father.

The man realized the correlation between the Father's suffering and His ultimate satisfaction: unspeakable suffering would indeed give way at long last to unspeakable joy and satisfaction, for the sorrows and grief are only temporary. Moreover, the intensity of the Father's pain only intensifies the Father's coming satisfaction!

A Prayer

The man addressed the amazing Being before him: "Father, quickly end this age. Quickly finish Your work in us. Put an end to the agony of Your creation. I ask this not only for our sake, but for the sake of Your whole creation.

Dear Father, I see in very small part what You are passing through, what You are bearing, the pain in Your heart. If I can lessen that pain in some way, allow me to do so. If I can bear some little part of your suffering for You or with You, I am willing.

¹ Phil. 3:10

Father, I—we—long for that day, when Your Son in us will come forth to rise to You once again, when we will be brought with Him to stand before You, when Your great love will shine forth from us like the sun. Father, bring us all—all who have such a willing heart—to that day.

I love You, Father.”

Encouragement

“Dear saints,” the man spoke aloud, “as we look forward to that day and that moment, prepare! Pray unceasingly. Rejoice in the Lord. Stay close to Him constantly. Let Him work His will, His life, and His Person into you. Love the Lord; love our Father; love the brethren. Pour out everything to the wonderful Lord who died for us. Care for one another. Be ready. Be ready!”

