

John Michael Talbot - The Inner Room

Though not exhaustive, these are some personal song descriptions:

1) *The Beatitudes* — If the heart of the New Testament is the Sermon on the Mount, then the heart of the Sermon is the Beatitudes. These eight paradoxes mark our way to the Mystery of the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery. The Greek of the Gospel suggests that Jesus taught the Beatitudes over and over. Repetition is the mother of learning! The song's distinctive sound — part Middle Eastern and pure JMT — sets up the entire project.

2) *You Are the Light* — This is a straight-ahead folk song with a text from the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon is as lyrically challenging as any '60s social-commentary songs, and the folk style more easily accommodates message-oriented songs. I tried cutting out some verses to shorten it — but, really, which words of Jesus could I omit? So I left it as is. Ricky Skaggs added tasteful mandolin sweetening to my straight-ahead 1960s style.

3) *Revive Us* comes from Ezekiel 37, and shows a clear charismatic influence, both lyrically and musically. It begins with a rather typical JMT cry for revival and ends with a musical build, amazingly arranged, with great playing by Phil Keaggy. Phil traded off effortlessly with my classical and acoustic lines.

4) *The Inner Room*, the title cut, distills Jesus' essential teaching about how we should pray. He cautions against praying hypocritically (like an actor) before others for show, or thinking that simply repeating empty words is enough. For me it is one of the most satisfying sonic and lyrical arrangements of the recording.

5) *The Our Father with Doxology* — The Lord's Prayer is the only prayer Jesus directly teaches us to pray. The Didache tells us that the earliest Church prayed it three times a day. It begins with monastic-style chant and moves to a vocal solo in private prayer. It ends with a choral treatment, which symbolizes the community of the Church. The Doxology is the addition of a copyist who wrote it in the margins of the ancient manuscripts, but it has always been prayed as an addition to the prayer. "Doxa" is Greek for "praise." "Logos" means "word." So the doxology is a word of uplifting praise and glorification of the Father.

(With the Sermon on the Mount as my theme, I was tempted to include my older *Lilies of the Field*, but decided to stay exclusively with new material.)

6) *My God, My God (Psalm 22)* was prayed by Jesus on the Cross. In this recording it comes after a pause from the glory of the Doxology. It speaks to the times when it seems that God has abandoned us. It is straight from the Good Friday Service. In praying it we learn that our times of seeming abandonment and soul-searching always lead to resurrection — when we unite our pain to the suffering of Jesus Christ. The track ends with a minimalist touch, a repetitive syncopation that symbolizes the hope for resurrection. In the end, the crucifixion is at hand. There is no end run around the cross. But "if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him."

7) **Change My Life** is the traditional Act of Contrition, and represents the repentance and comfort that occur after times of trial and desolation. It was written and recorded for my 50th recording, *Living Water*, but was not used. It fits nicely here.

8) **One Thing (Psalm 27)** is a tune I wrote in a church sacristy before a concert in Sioux City. It has a rather Celtic or music-box feel, with an American “roots” twist added by Ricky Skaggs. It has a simple and humble feel. Lyrically, it shows that we enter the House of God freely after repentance and forgiveness.

9) **Enter the Narrow Gate** is a straightforward traditional hymn, with a bit of Middle Eastern percussion to bring us back to the musical theme of the Beatitudes. The theme of forgiveness, which runs through the teachings of Jesus — and is often so hard to do in today’s polarized secular climate — remains the key to binding or loosing grace in our lives.

10) I end with **Go Now in Peace**. The text I’m using, Simeon’s Canticle, is traditionally used to close the day in Night Prayer of the Roman Liturgy of the Hours. I played the pattern freeform, and it developed organically, so I included it in the treatment. It is a satisfying song to play and sing, and so a good way to conclude the project. It reminds us that peace is not cheap. A sword pierced the hearts of Mary and Jesus. A sword pierces the heart of the Church. But peace comes through the Good News that only Jesus can bring to the world. With him you can bring it to everyone you meet!

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