



“LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING!”

Psalm 96:1-3

I. INTRODUCTION

James Weldon Johnson wrote “Lift Every Voice and Sing” in 1899 for an address to celebrate President Abraham Lincoln’s birthday the following year. His classically trained brother, J. Rosamond Johnson, composed it. James Weldon wrote the song while serving as the principal of the segregated Stanton School in Jacksonville, Florida. His students were the first to learn and sing it. The NAACP later dubbed the song as the “Negro national anthem” in 1919. There’s been great controversy over America’s national anthem, “The Star Spangled Banner.” Should we stand? Should we kneel? Should we remove our hats? Should we place our hands over our hearts? Should we raise a fist? Should we sing at all? In the wake of police brutality and systemic racism in America, the NFL has decided to play or have performed the Black national anthem before every game in Week 1 of the season.

Sources report, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” will be played **before** “The Star-Spangled Banner.” The response will be interesting. It’s unclear how singing the song advances the cause of racial justice. Certainly, a 3-4-minute song can’t heal the wounds of 3-4 centuries of hypocrisy, hatred, and hostility toward African Americans in America. While the NFL is singing a new song, it’s the same old song! Today’s message encourages, exhorts, and, hopefully, empowers you as we explore how the Black national anthem has Scriptural parallels and commands us to **“Lift Every Voice and Sing!”**

II. VERSE 1

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and Heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise,
High as the list’ning skies,
let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

Isaiah 24:14
Psalm 148:13
2 Corinthians 3:17
Psalm 32:11
Psalm 148:1-4
Psalm 93:3-4 (NIV)

Sing a song
full of faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song
full of the hope that the present has brought us;

Deuteronomy 5:15

Romans 5:3-5

Facing the rising sun
Of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Lamentations 3:22-23
Philippians 3:14

III. VERSE 2

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chast’ning rod,
Felt in the day that hope
Unborn had died;

Exodus 1:13-14

Romans 8:24-25

Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet,
Come to the place on which our fathers sighed?

1 Corinthians 15:58
Psalm 73:2
Genesis 25:8-10

We have come
over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come,
treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,

Jeremiah 9:1

Luke 21:24

Out from the gloomy past,
till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam
of our star is cast.

Isaiah 43:18-19

Joshua 1:5

Psalm 147:4

IV. VERSE 3

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus
Far on the way;
Thou who has by thy might,
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.

Psalm 119:28

Psalm 56:8

Psalm 124:1

Zechariah 4:6

John 8:12

Isaiah 49:16

Lest our feet
Stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Least our hearts,
drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee,

Psalm 1:1

Matthew 7:13-14

Matthew 15:8

Ephesians 5:18

Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.

Psalm 91:1

Ephesians 6:13

John 17:3

Exodus 33:1

V. CONCLUSION

Revelation has the final word on humanity's anthem. "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" All the angels stood around . . . the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen." Until then, trust, pray, and "Lift Every Voice and Sing!"

Source: *African American Heritage Hymnal*, GIA Publications, Inc., Chicago: IL (2001).

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