

Don't Take Me to Church Without the Gospel: A Review of Hozier's "Take Me to Church"

What started as a music [video](#) on YouTube as a statement against the abuse of the homosexual community peaked as the second most popular song according to Billboard Top 100 in early 2015. With its powerful music and damning words towards the Church, I was compelled to research and find the meaning and implications of Hozier's song "Take Me to Church." In the song, Hozier captures the sacrifice of religion without the truth and hope of the gospel.

The chorus, especially, paints a rather bleak picture of the seemingly pointless sacrifice of religion. In it Hozier writes,

"I'll worship like a dog at the shrine of your lies
I'll tell you my sins and you can sharpen your knife
Offer me that deathless death
Good god, let me give you my life."

Through the song, Hozier rightly grasps the element of sacrifice required of faith. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all include parallel passages that call Christians to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus.

Christians' Meaningful Sacrifice

Sam Allberry, author of [Is God Anti-Gay?](#) and associate pastor at St Mary's Church in Maidenhead, UK, spoke at Covenant College recently about Christianity and homosexuality as someone who struggles with same-sex attraction himself. He expounded upon this idea of the sacrifice of Christians when he told the story of someone with a same-sex partner who asked

him, "What could possibly be worth leaving my partner for?"

This question of sacrifice is essential for everyone faced with the gospel to ask. There is a cost; you will have to deny yourself, whether it's the issue of same-sex sexual practices, alcohol abuse, pride, or even just laziness.

If the message of the Bible stopped there, we would be left with the hopeless and purposeless sacrifice that the song portrays. However, the Bible does not start or end with our sacrifice. Romans 5 points Christians to Christ's ultimate sacrifice for us by proclaiming that ". . . God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Those who trust in Christ will never have to pay the price of our own sins because Christ did it once and for all on the cross while we were still in sin. We can entrust Him with our lives because He first gave His perfect life for us. Even though we are steeped in sin as Hozier points out through the lyrics "We were sick but I love it," Christ does not leave us in our sickness. In fact, He heals us, showing us hope in something much greater than our sins.

Allberry concluded that the answer to the question presented to him had to be: the gospel—only the gospel is worth leaving everything for. The gospel is truly *the* good news for everyone, because through His sacrifice the lyric rings true, "only then I am clean."

So our sacrifice is meaningful in Christ not because our sacrificing saves us but because it is a response of the saving grace Christians have already received. Christians can give up our old way of life because Christ has given us new life. In Ephesians 4, we are called to this painful process of "putting off our old self which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

How Should We Respond?

It is legitimate to wonder what we as Christians should do with songs and a culture that seem to attack or misrepresent the Church. I do not think we should respond to such songs by posting combative comments online or by changing the radio station every time the song plays. Rather, we should appreciate the song for its musicality and learn from its lyrics. I see two main takeaways:

First, I think we should reflect on what songs say about our culture's view of the Church and how we as the Church can respond to this marred image. In an [interview](#) by Gigwise, Hozier says that "It hasn't been a good year for the Church-it hasn't been a good hundred years for the Church." In some ways, I agree with Hozier that, especially on the topic of homosexuality, we have not loved those outside and inside the Church well. I mourn for those abused by the Church for their sexual sin as the song and music video illustrate. Sometimes the Church has fallen short of showing truth in love as commanded by Scripture. Instead the Church often fails to speak truth by accepting the sin of homosexuality or lovelessly alienating, and trying to legalistically "fix" the sin.

Second, the core of our religion as Christians must remain the gospel; without it the lyric would ring true: "Every Sunday's getting more bleak, a fresh poison each week." In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that as Christians, "We are of all people the most to be pitied" if the gospel—the message of Christ's death and resurrection that reconciles us to God—is not true. I would challenge you, as I have been challenged, to continually ask yourself, "How does the gospel apply?" Wherever the gospel is missing so is truth, hope, and joy.

While I struggle with messages of hopelessness, I marvel in the promise that the gospel is true and there is hope for us who rest in the salvation of Christ both in this life and the

next. I look forward to Heaven with my Lord and Savior, and yes, it is something worth leaving everything for.

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