

Anthem Notes for March 12, 2017

He, That Shall Endure to the End Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
He that shall endure to the end shall be saved.

This morning's anthem is taken from Felix Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah*, which is one of the greatest sacred choral works of all time. Its beautiful recounting of the life and trials of the prophet Elijah speak even today with a timeless message. It shows us that hope triumphs over despair, faith over doubt.

The anthem is taken from the second half of the oratorio when Elijah is discouraged and disheartened. King Ahab, goaded by his wicked queen, Jezebel, is seeking to destroy Elijah and he has to flee for his safety to the wilderness. He feels abandoned by God and wishes only to die. In the midst of this despair, come messages of reassurance and hope, set to some of Mendelssohn's most lyrical and beautiful music, such as He, Watching Over Israel Slumbers Not nor Sleeps and O Rest in the Lord, both of which precede this chorus in the oratorio.

This message, 'he that shall endure to the end,' is sung by the choir as a simple chorale, emphasizing the text. Following this in the oratorio, the Lord tells Elijah to arise and then the Lord demonstrates his power.

This very simple message, particularly in the context of Elijah's challenges, doubts and ultimate faith, is a message to us from God—an encouragement to hold fast, to believe and have faith.

Jakob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809-1847) was born into a wealthy and cultured Berlin family. His grandfather, Moses Mendelssohn, was a renowned Jewish philosopher and his father, Abraham, was a highly successful banker. After Felix became famous, Abraham would sometimes joke, '*I used to be known as the son of my father; now I am known as the father of my son!*' It was Abraham who converted the family to Christianity and changed the name to Mendelssohn-Bartholdy although Felix preferred to use only Mendelssohn.

The leading German Romantic musician of his time, Mendelssohn's presentation of Bach's St. Matthew passion in 1829 led to renewed interest in Bach's music. The oratorio *Elijah* is probably Mendelssohn's most famous choral work although several arias and choruses from St. Paul are very well known.

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Felix was six when he was baptized in the Lutheran Church. Though he was a committed Christian, he integrated his Jewish roots into his life and music. In fact, his Jewish background was not much of an impediment in his musical career. He was probably considered the greatest musical genius of the 19th century school of German romantic music. Some say that he was the most impressive musical prodigy since Mozart.

Felix Mendelssohn lived and died a Christian. At his Christian funeral, attended by multitudes of admirers, a six-hundred voice choir sang: "Christ and the Resurrection." Felix was buried in cemetery of Holy Cross Church in Berlin. Today, a huge cross marks his grave.

All of these outward manifestations of Mendelssohn's commitment to Christianity did not impress the Nazis. To them, he was always a Jew. Almost a century after his death, they besmirched his memory as a Jewish composer. They forbade his music to be played. They ordered that the huge statue of him in Leipzig be taken down and destroyed. They also closed the Mendelssohn banking house and ordered all the Mendelssohn descendants still living in Germany to leave. At book-burnings, Mendelssohn's music was thrown into the fires. His name was erased from German histories of music.

But still today we are blessed by his amazing music and the choir is privileged to sing this to you this morning.



Felix Mendelssohn



Restored Mendelssohn statue in Leipzig outside the St. Thomas Church (J. S. Bach's church)