

#301 – When I Survey the Wondrous Cross (Benjamin Bassett) – 26.09.20

Directions/Things to do

- Opening: Today we are going to study the hymn *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*.
- Background: Isaac Watts penned this text in 1707 (originally titled *Crucifixion to the World by the Cross of Christ*). He is broadly considered the father of English hymnody, and wrote this as a communion hymn along with 100 others. The prolific Charles Wesley, who wrote more than 6,000 hymns, reportedly said he would give up all his hymns to have written this one.
- Definitions:
 - Survey: To look closely, carefully, and thoroughly at something, often to appraise its true value.
 - Contempt: The conviction that something is entirely worthless and beneath consideration.
- *[read the hymn, pray]*
- Verse-by-verse structure (for discussion and summary)
 - The intellect undergoes a shift in perspective by surveying the cross
 - Now this is put into practice by sacrificing the vain things of the world, boasting in Christ alone
 - Now Christ's love in the crucifixion is examined closely, the sorrow and mercy juxtaposed
 - The only response to this immense love is all we have: soul, life, all.
- Thesis: When we truly examine the cross, the sheer weight of Christ's suffering and the love realigns our life priorities (pride → loss, demanding complete surrender).
- **As we read the hymn again, [consider] what happens when we survey the cross?**
 - What does it mean to “count but loss?”
 - Re: Philippians 3:7-8, counting as loss doesn't just mean we value things a little less; it means recognizing that our earthly gains are entirely bankrupt compared to the worth of Christ.
 - To count something as loss, we first have to identify it. Watts challenges us to look at the specific things we naturally rely on for comfort/status and deliberately recognize their comparative emptiness.
 - The hymn outlines a clear progression of response. It starts internally by re-evaluating our “richest gain” (v.1), moves to actively sacrificing the “vain things” that charm us (v.2), and culminates in total surrender of “my soul, my life, my all” (v.4/5).
- **Why should surveying the cross make us pour contempt on our pride? How do we do this in our lives?**
 - When we look closely at the Prince of glory subjecting Himself to death and a crown of thorns, it starkly highlights how ridiculous our own self-importance is. The scale of sacrifice nullifies arrogance.
 - Re: Galatians 6:14, there is no room left for middle ground. We are forbidden to boast in anything but the cross. In light of a salvation which required the death of Christ, our personal moral track records or life achievements lose their bragging rights.
 - Pouring contempt on pride means unlinking our identity from our ability. When we are praised for a success or when we fail terribly, we must recall that our standing and worth are anchored entirely in Christ's blood, rather than our own merit. (see Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 3:9)
- Any other thoughts?



The Pilgrim of the Cross at the End of His Journey - Thomas Cole

- Summary: This hymn is an exercise in seeing all things through the cross of Christ. It asks us to closely examine the physical and spiritual reality of what Christ suffered, and as a consequence the things we take pride in seem hollow compared to this great salvation. We count these things as loss because of the worth of Christ, yielding our lives entirely to Him.
- Sing ***When I Survey the Wondrous Cross***
- Then sing ***Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed***, another hymn by Isaac Watts that takes the observations we just made about the cross and turns them into a deeply personal confession of our own guilt, ending with the exact same call to totally surrender our lives to Christ.

“Yet it surely must be agreed that this is the most penetrating of all hymns, the most demanding, the most imaginative. It does these things precisely because its style is so simple. It is drawn throughout in strong, clear, simple lines and colours.” -Erik Routley

Galatians 6:14 “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (what Watts was referencing)

1 Peter 1:18-19 “Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”

Philippians 3:7-8 “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (9: and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...)

When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

[His dying crimson like a robe
Spreads o'er his body on the tree,
Then am I dead to all the globe,
And all the globe is dead to me.]*

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

*Note that Watts placed brackets around the fourth stanza, noting it “may be left out in Singing without disturbing the Sense,” an option designed either to preserve time or to avoid “Words too Poetical for meaner Understandings, or too particular for whole Congregations to sing.”

When I Survey The Wondrous Cross 124

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross. Gal. 6:14

Isaac Watts

8.8.8.8.

Lowell Mason

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It features a treble and bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 3/2 time signature. The melody is primarily in the treble clef, with the piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The lyrics are written below the notes. The score consists of three systems of music. The first system contains the first line of the hymn. The second system contains the second line. The third system contains the third line. The lyrics are: '1. When I sur - vey the won - drous cross On which the Prince of glo - ry died, My rich - est gain I count but loss, And pour con - tempt on all my pride.'

1. When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.
2. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.
3. See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?
4. His dying crimson like a robe
Spreads o'er his body on the tree,
Then am I dead to all the globe,
And all the globe is dead to me.
5. Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all!

Galatians 6:14

But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Philippians 3:7-8

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed

341



1. A - las! and did my Sav - ior bleed, and did my Sov - 'reign die!
2. Was it for crimes that I had done he groaned up - on the tree?
3. Well might the sun in dark - ness hide, and shut his glo - ries in,
4. Thus might I hide my blush - ing face while his dear cross ap - pears;
5. But drops of grief can ne'er re - pay the debt of love I owe;



- Would he de - vote that sa - cred head for such a worm as I?
A - maz - ing pit - y! Grace un - known! And love be - yond de - gree!
• when Christ, the might - y Mak - er, died for man the crea - ture's sin.
dis - solve my heart in thank - ful - ness, and melt mine eyes in tears.
here, Lord, I give my - self a - way, 'tis all that I can do.



Isaac Watts, 1707
Alt. 1961

MARTYRDOM C.M.
Hugh Wilson, 1800
Arr. Robert A. Smith, 1825