



Beneath the Cross of Jesus



"Beneath the cross of Jesus, I fain would take my stand,
the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land;
a home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way, from
the burning of the noon-tide heat, and the burden of the day.

"Upon that cross of Jesus mine eye at times can see
the very dying form of one who suffered there for me;
and from my smitten heart with tears two wonders I confess -
the wonders of His glorious love and my unworthiness..

"I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place -
I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of His face;
content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss,
my sinful self, my only shame, my glory, all the cross."

"The preaching of the cross is foolish to those who perish, but to us who are saved, it is the power of God." - 1 Corinthians 1:18

"O God, You are my God; I shall seek you earnestly; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You." - Psalm 63:1-3

"Beneath the Cross of Jesus" was written by a frail Scottish Presbyterian woman named Elizabeth Clephane, who also wrote "The Ninety and Nine." She was frail and sickly, and died at the age of 39, but Elizabeth left a legacy of faith and compassion, being remembered for her helpful, cheery nature. Among the sick and dying in her area, she was known as "Sunshine," which makes the words of the 3rd verse that much more meaningful - "I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of His face." It is clear that the Light of the World was shining brightly through this frail, but faithful, woman.

It is also obvious that Elizabeth was an ardent Bible student, like most Scottish Presbyterians of her day, for this hymn is replete with biblical symbolism and imagery in phrases like "a mighty rock" in Isaiah 32:2, "a weary land" in Psalm 63:1; "a home within the wilderness" in Jeremiah 9:2, "rest upon the way" in Isaiah 28:12, "noon day heat" in Isaiah 4:6, and "burden of the day" in Matthew 11:28.

In John 3, Jesus also presented some very vivid imagery in his conversation with Nicodemus about the new birth. He referred back to the time in Numbers 21:5-9 where many of the Israelite people were dying after being bitten by fiery serpents. The serpents were God's

judgment in response to the complaints of the people against God and Moses in verse 4, claiming that they had been brought out of Egypt to die in the wilderness. The snake attacks were enough to cause them to confess their iniquity and ask that they might be released from the judgment God had sent.

God provided the remedy in a very unusual way. After Moses interceded for the people, the Lord told him, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live" (v.8). So Moses made a serpent and set it on a pole, and if a serpent bit a person, they just needed to look upon that image to be healed. Jesus tells Nicodemus in John 3:14-15:

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up" so that whoever believes will in him have eternal life." And that statement leads right into verse 16, which says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Jesus was giving a veiled prediction of His death on the cross that would be the culmination of His earthly ministry. The point of the illustration is in the two words "lifted up." Just as Moses lifted up the snake on the pole so that all who looked upon it might live physically, those who look to Christ, who was "lifted up" on the cross, will live spiritually and eternally. His mission was bound up in the supreme love of God for the evil "world" of humanity that is in rebellion against Him. The word "so" in verse 16 emphasizes the intensity or greatness of His love. This powerful truth touched the heart of Elizabeth Clephane so long ago, and it should stir us to love the Savior more each day as by faith we "look upon the very dying form of One who suffered there for me."

My hymn devotional puts it well: "There is no neutral ground when we face the cross; either we accept its atoning work and become a new person, or we reject it and remain in our sinful, self-centered state. When we take our stand with Christ and His redemption accomplished at Calvary, we are compelled to make two profound confessions: "The wonders of His glorious love and my own worthlessness."

The world will call us foolish, or even hateful, bigoted and narrow-minded, but God calls those who rely on their own wisdom "fools." Each of those individuals has decided at some point to suppress the truth and accept a lie that is more in line with their worldly thinking. So Paul tells us in Romans that God gives such people over to their depraved minds, rather than experiencing the transforming power of the cross.

Jesus died for unworthy sinners so that we could be reconciled with our holy God and be made worthy in Christ. May the last two lines of today's hymn be our testimony: "Content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss; my sinful self, my only shame, my glory all the cross."