



THEME SONG

O Sacred Head



*O sacred head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down;
Now scornfully surrounded
With thorns, Thine only crown;
How art Thou pale with anguish,
With sore abuse and scorn;
How does that visage languish,
Which once was bright as morn!*

*What language shall I borrow
To thank Thee, dearest Friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?
O, make me Thine forever;
And, should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never
Outlive my love to Thee.*

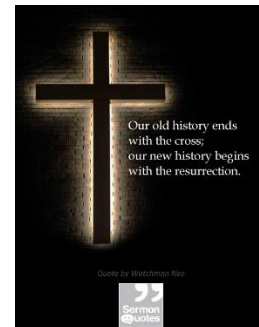
Words (English) James W. Alexander (1830)
Music: Hans L. Hassler (w. 1601), arr J. S. Bach (w 1729)



The Cross – Our Why

Several years ago, I had a thought-provoking conversation with a friend on the subject of motivation. At that time she worked in an office where her Christian beliefs and behaviors were clearly outside the prevailing social norm. Sometimes her colleagues would ask her, either condescendingly or mockingly, why she made the decisions she did; and she struggled to explain her reasoning adequately.

Their backgrounds, their worldviews, their cultural mores were so drastically different from hers that she felt sometimes that nothing she could say could break through. She would reply that she was raised that way, that she didn't need to do certain things to have a good time, or that certain choices lead to much better consequences. "If I tell them in that setting the real reason I do or don't behave a certain way, I just don't know if they can understand it. Because the real reason is that – Jesus died on the cross."



Whether she was right or not in deciding that it was not helpful to say those words in that context is a discussion for another day. But her statement of her motivation struck me as very much to the point. "I do what I do because Jesus died on the cross."

Every day as Christians, we make choices. And in doing so, it is just as important to ask ourselves the Why, as well as the What. Why do we get up week after week, year after year, early on Sunday morning to gather with a group of people? Why do we immediately head over to the hospital emergency department when we hear someone we know has been admitted? Why do we seek reconciliation after an estrangement? Why do we sit down to read the Bible? Why do we take the time to kneel beside our bed in prayer at night? Why do we adhere to sexual ethics which are so

countercultural? Why do we decide who to marry, what kind of attitude to take to our job, what answer we will give to a catty remark?

There are many answers for those Whys: That's the way I raised. Or I want to make sure. "Check all the boxes." Or I want to look good to others. Or this is what I should do to earn my way to heaven. But as my friend had discerned, scripture gives us one ultimate Why for the choices we make, and that is the cross.

... conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile 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. I Peter 1:17b-19

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. I Corinthians 1:18

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. Galatians 6:14

Ina Ruth McKune, Rolla, Missouri



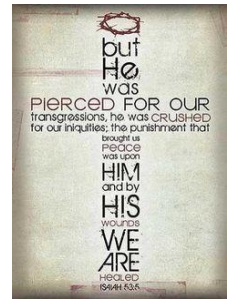
The Cross

One of the most important events in the history of mankind happened in the most disgusting place. It was outside the city in what we would refer to as "the dump." It happened at a place that resembled a skull and was called Golgotha. It was the site where criminals were nailed to a cross for public humiliation before they died from their cruel injuries.

God constantly surprises us by using the most menial and seemingly unimportant things for eternally valuable events. God did not send His Son to be born into a royal family of wealth and importance. He, instead, chose a poor, betrothed virgin and her carpenter fiancé to bring this child into the world. Jesus was born far from the family home in Nazareth in a structure made to house animals. His first bed was a feeding trough full of hay. Not what you or I would have imagined.

When Jesus started His ministry, He didn't go to the learned rabbis and the religious leaders of the day, but instead chose as His followers fishermen and tax collectors. He mingled with the poor, the outcasts such as lepers, and women who did not have the best of reputations. He didn't have a marching army to defeat the Romans, but simple words of wisdom and love.

His earthly life ended on a cross of shame, with only a few of His followers there to witness it. What happened on that ugly cross was the most beautiful sacrifice! The very Son of God, who had never sinned, willingly took all our sins and allowed Himself to be nailed to the cross as the God-required sacrifice for our transgressions. He yielded His spirit to His Father, and His blood flowed freely. He was buried in a borrowed tomb, and God raised Him up on the third day.



How very thankful I am that God saw fit to redeem us! Am I worthy of the sacrifice Jesus made for me? Absolutely not! Because of His pattern of using unimportant and inconsequential things to further His purposes, I can begin to understand how He can use me in the plan to redeem mankind.

In my weaknesses and failures, Jesus can demonstrate His power. With the help of the Holy Spirit in my life, I can show the love of Jesus to those around me. It will not be in mighty events, but in my everyday happenings. It may be in a smile to a cashier, a sympathizing look for a mother with young children, opening a door for someone, or a simple note of encouragement.

I think too often I am looking for the "grand" moment that I can bring others to Christ, and forget it's the little menial things I can do that will show that Jesus is working in my life. In the same way that the religious people of Jesus' day did not want or expect a Messiah who worked with the ordinary, we may be made to feel we aren't doing enough.

When I feel discouraged, I remember the story of the cross. Who would have expected the Son of God, the King of kings, to die such a horrible death in public shame? God finds worth in the simple, the every day, and what others around us may see as worthless.

Lorna Smith, Lubbock, TX



THUMP!

Maybe God allows tough times in our lives to refine us...to bring us closer to Him. We need to be ready to approach these times with the right attitude and seek His wisdom.

When a potter bakes a pot, he checks its solidity by pulling it out of the oven and thumping it. If it's ready, it sings. If he hears a thud, back in the oven it goes to be heated again.

The character of each of us can be determined by thumping. Have you been thumped lately? Late night phone calls, burned meals, a flat tire... Those are thumps. Deadline...thump!



Thumps are those irritating inconveniences that trigger the worst in us. They catch us off guard. They're not big enough to be a crisis, but if we get enough thumps, WATCH OUT!!

Thump... "I'm engaged."
Thump... "I've been transferred."
Thump..."We are moving to Texas."
Thump...every line in Walmart has 20 people in it!
Thump..."Who left the milk out all day?" Thump...

Thumps can sometimes be very loud. Sonic boom loud! Rattle the windows loud! Thump..."Call the doctor's office, right now!"

Our children deliver thumps, such as..."We're having a baby." "We're buying a house."

Our spouses...do we even want to go there? "We are being transferred; get the moving boxes ready." How do we respond? Do we ever want to yell at the potter, "Don't put me back in that oven!"

While my rant continues, those around me are being affected. It does not stop with me. It's like ripples when a rock hits the surface of the pond. The effects go farther and farther. We watch as the small rock from our hand hits the surface with a plop. The ripples eddy out in tiny circles, gradually spreading into great gaping spheres of silent water, reaching farther until we can't see them. This is a reminder that each event could reach forever.

How do I respond? Do I sing, or do I thud?

In Luke 6:45, Jesus said, "...out of the nature of the heart, a man speaks." Wait...what comes out of my mouth is what I'm feeling in my heart??!!

How do we respond when thumped by people at work, at school, by family members, someone at the grocery store? Our initial reaction during these times reflects who we are. In Romans 2:5-7, the apostle Paul speaks to our heart and the effects on our eternal life. In 2 Corinthians 6:6-7, Paul gives us tools to guard ourselves against a wrong attitude. In James 1:19-20, we find qualities needed in "Thump Trials." He says, "*So then my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*"

Like the water circles, a good thump can have residual effects. If we don't respond in a godly manner, things could get worse.

God the Father is never far away when we are thumped. He is near enough to hear an anxious beat of my heart or a hitch of my breath. I loved a visual a Brother used in a devotional recently. God the Father, with His hand on my back, can tell by His touch if I am singing.

Thump...thump...thump...

God might be saying, "You will come through this, beloved. My hand is on you. Trust me and seek me."

God the Father is never far away, even when thumps become a crash. He has His hand on our backs. Pray and stay near; sing and take the next breath. We are His servants, and we can sing when we are thumped. We belong to The Potter.

Nettie Martin, Rolla, Missouri



The Message of the Cross

The gospel (good news) and the message of the cross: the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Lord and Savior.

I Corinthians 1:18—For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Christ's willing, selfless sacrifice (His death):

John 10:11—I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

John 10:17-18—Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

Romans 5:6-8—For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Coming to know God and our faithful belief calls for our willing selfless sacrifice (our death to self):

I Corinthians 1:22—For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

John 3:16—For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 10:14-16—I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

John 14:15—If you love Me, keep My commandments.

His burial:

Mark 15:42-46—Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

Our burial and rebirth:

John 3:3-6—Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Romans 6:3-4—Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

His resurrection:

Mark 16:1-7—Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first *day* of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, “Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?” But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.”

Our resurrection and calling:

Mark 16:15-16—And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

Matthew 28:19-20—“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and

of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

John 15:10—If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

Galatians 2:20—I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Conclusion:

I Corinthians 15:57-58—But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

I Corinthians 1:22-25—For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

I could not have said it better.

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Writers Needed!

Do you like to write? If you write pieces about everyday life with spiritual applications, please contact me. Most pieces need to be 500-750 words or less, but there is some leeway on that. Themes of upcoming issues are available on request. Sunrise is a free publication, so there is no compensation. Articles will be edited for grammar, spelling, etc. Please contact me at: evelynwa57@gmail.com

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