

Beneath the Cross of Jesus

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction: Gal. 6:12, 14

"Beneath the Cross of Jesus" by Elizabeth C. Clephane

"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 noontide heat, and the burden of the day."

Elizabeth Cecilia Douglas Clephane was born in Scotland in 1830 and died in 1869. The daughter of a county sheriff, she lived most of her brief life near Edinburgh. Though in frail health most of her life, Elizabeth found the strength to help the poor and sick in her town. She and her sister gave all that they could spare to charity including, it is said, selling their horse and carriage for the benefit of the needy. The townspeople of Melrose referred to Elizabeth as "the Sunbeam."

"Beneath the cross of Jesus," focusing on the shelter of the cross, was first published three years after the author's death in 1872 under the title "Breathings on the Border," a reference to the border between life and death. This poem and others of hers appeared in the Scottish Presbyterian magazine *The Family Treasury*, submitted by a friend. This hymn was written one year before her death in 1868. The anonymous source who submitted her poems for publication said these lines: "express the experiences, the hopes and the longings of a young Christian lately released."

In the same collection was her famous narrative poem, "There were ninety and nine that safely lay." Both of these hymns were published by the American songwriter Ira D. Sankey (1840-1908), in his *Sacred Songs* (1873). The hymn is full of comforting, and perhaps paradoxical language, about the cross, after all, an instrument of the cruelest torture. These include in stanza two "the shadow of a mighty rock," "a home within the wilderness," "a rest upon the way." An omitted third stanza provides additional images of consolation: a "happy shelter," "refuge tried and sweet," a "trysting place," and "a ladder up to heaven," a reference to Jacob's ladder.

Originally the song had five stanzas; the two omitted are as profound as the verses we commonly sing. The first speaks of the protection and power of the cross, and the second speaks of how the cross helps us when we approach our own deaths.

O safe and happy shelter, O refuge tried and sweet,
O trysting place where heaven's love and heaven's justice meet!
As to the exiled patriarch that wondrous dream was given,
So seems my Savior's Cross to me - a ladder up to heaven.
There lies beneath its shadow, but on the further side,
The darkness of an open grave that gapes both deep and wide;
And there between us stands the cross, two arms outstretched to save,
Like watchman set to guard the way from that eternal grave.

Elizabeth's frail health kept her from many of the works she would have liked to have done; much of her time was spent in an invalid's bed. But her view of the cross of Jesus from her sickbed was clearer and brighter for the many days she spent meditating on the glorious Savior's sacrifice. 150 years later, she is still teaching us about Jesus. (History of Hymns: "Beneath the Cross of Jesus" by C. Michael Hawn)

I. THE SETTING

- A. Golgotha was located on a hill outside the city near the largest thoroughfare to Jerusalem, visible from most points within the city limits.
 - 1. It was the high holy days of the Jews and multitudes were there and would pass by - Matt. 27:39
 - 2. For many, the cross would have made little impression. Jesus was just another criminal executed, a commonplace incident in those days.
 - 3. Jesus is prominently displayed in our own world, and many still pass by the cross today displaying similar dismissal
 - Christianity - 2.4 billion - 33.51%
 - Islam - 1.6 billion - 22.32%
 - Secular/ Atheist - 1.1 billion - 15.35%
 - Hinduism - 1.15 billion - 6.06%
 - Taoism - 394 million - 5.5%
 - Buddhism - 376 million - 5.25%
 - All others - 12.01% (Wikipedia)

II. THE SUBSTANCE

- A. The people crucified Jesus - Luke 23:13-25
- B. Why did they demand the death of an innocent man?
 - 1. Envy - Matt. 27:18; John 12:19
 - 2. Self-preservation - John 11:48
 - 3. Ignorance - Acts 3:17; 1Cor. 2:8
- C. Because of our sins, we also had a part in the mob screaming: "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" We were on Golgotha beneath the cross of Jesus.
 - 1. 1John 3:4; Rom. 3:23; 1Cor. 15:3-4; Acts 2:36-28
 - 2. What were the spirits of the people at the foot of the cross?

III. THE SPIRITS

- A. The scoffers and mockers - Matt. 27:39-44, 49
 - 1. The most religious, the wealthiest, the hardest working, the most educated of people stood there for a common purpose: to heap upon the head of this unfortunate man all of the frustration, anger, and fear they were feeling toward the world around them and their place in it.
 - 2. The same people are still treating the Lord with contempt. Rather than seeing sin, theirs and others, as the source of sorrow in this world, they choose to blame the One who came to save them from it.
 - a. They mock because the Gospel reminds them of their own sin and pain - Tim. 4:3-4
 - b. They mock Jesus with alternative doctrines - Matt. 7:21-23
 - c. They mock the cross by self-righteousness - Rom. 10:1-4
 - d. They mock because Jesus hasn't returned - 2Peter 3:3-4
- B. The unconcerned and indifferent - Matt. 27:35-36
 - 1. Soldiers just doing their jobs, jaded, desensitized by the violence and pain, no longer willing or able to care
 - 2. We often become desensitized to sin and consequences - 1Tim. 4:1-2

3. Not just in our own lives, but in the lives of others - Rom. 1:32
4. Does it cause your heart to feel pain when a sinner dies?
- C. The convinced but unconverted; some believe, but it does not change their lives - Matt. 27:54
 1. Many saw the miracles and heard His teaching but were not moved to believe - John 12:42-43
 2. Some wouldn't believe unless they saw it themselves - John 20:29-31
- D. The discouraged and disheartened - Matt. 26:56; John 19:26-27
 1. Like John, when we through discouragement forsake the Lord, we have two choices: we can remain apart from the cross or return to it
 - a. 2Tim. 4:10; Heb. 10:25; Acts 8:22
 2. Jesus loves those who stumble from discouragement and wants them to return to Him - 1Peter 2:25
- D. The loving and faithful were never far from the cross - Matt. 27:55-56
 1. God's children always near the cross - 1Cor. 1:18, 2:2
 2. Jesus on the cross was the living and dying representative of the love of God for humankind - John 17:4, 19:30
 3. Luke 19:10; Phil. 2:8; Luke 23:34
 4. Everything points to the cross - 1John 4:19; 1Peter 2:21; Heb. 12:1-2

Conclusion:

- A. Everyone in this world will pass beneath the cross of Jesus, either in this life in salvation or in the life to come in Judgment. What will be our spirit as we pass beneath the cross?
- B. Jesus died on the cross, never to do so again; but, we can:
 1. Crucify Him again - Heb. 6:4-6
 2. Trample Him under our feet - Heb. 10:26-31
 3. Magnify Him in our lives - Phil. 1:20