

## **THEN SINGS MY SOUL 10** **“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”**

*As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world's interest in me has also died. Gal. 6: 14*

Dr. Isaac Watts has lovingly been called the Father of English Hymnody. He is most noted for the writing of such favorite hymns as Joy to the World, Jesus Shall Reign, I'll Praise my Maker While I've Breath, O God our Helper in Ages Past, Alas and Did My Savior Bleed, Am I a Soldier of the Cross, This is the Day the Lord Has Made, Come we that Love the Lord, We're Marching to Zion... and my personal favorite: When I Survey The Wondrous Cross. Among the 700 or so he wrote, this was also Charles Wesley's favorite; once mentioning he would give up all the other 9000 he wrote, if he could have written this one! We sing 4 verses, but there were originally 5, and someone added another when the tune was revised some 50 years later. The original 5 verses of: “Crucifixion to the World by the Cross of Christ” (its original title) are these:

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 I am 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.

But Isaac Watts is not considered the father of English Hymnody just because he wrote such amazing songs and poems. It's when he wrote them that distinguishes him as the beloved among all hymn-writers. Isaac was born on July 17, 1674 into a family of 8 other children, whose father was in prison during his birth. Not because he was a criminal, but because he was a non-conformist; his dad was the pastor of a Church that did not conform to the legal and state-supported Church of England. Being a rebel was in his blood.

But Isaac Watts is not the father of English Hymnody because of his non-conformist DNA, no, he was/is considered the father of modern hymns because prior to his time, the only vocal music allowed or deemed acceptable in any church, Anglican or otherwise, were vocal of the Psalms. As with many teenagers of most ages...young Isaac Watts complained of the boring and dirge-like drudgery of singing these lifeless tunes of ancient scripture. One morning after another worship service in his dad's church while complaining to his father; young Isaac described the singing as "a rusty saw being sharpened next to my ear." His dad had heard enough and rejoined: "then give us something better". That very night at evening worship, young Isaac opened the service with this first verse to a new song:

"Behold the glories of the Lamb  
Amidst His Father's throne;  
Prepare new honours for His Name  
*And songs before unknown.*"

He followed that each week for the better part of 2 years with another new song, including many of those mentioned above. You see, it was not that his new songs were such a radical departure from the Scripture, but from the traditional ways of singing them that had become accepted. He would have been right at home in the emerging church of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The primary meaning of this great hymn (to me at least) is most poignantly contained in that verse that's been left out of our hymnal, though it appears running throughout its other 4. It is that byproduct of surveying the cross, that renders the world 'crucified to me and I to the world'. This is how Isaac wrote it in verse 4: "Then I am dead to all the globe, and all the globe is dead to me". This is how the apostle Paul wrote it: *Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world's interest in me has also died.*

It is that concept I wish to explore awhile this morning. How does a 21<sup>st</sup> Century follower of Jesus live in relation to the world around us. I'm not just talking about taking up space in Bismarck ND, on planet earth; I'm talking about how as a disciple of Jesus we live in a world that appears to be pulling farther and farther away from Jesus Christ, a world that appears to be growing more and more antithetical to Jesus Christ, a world that is rejecting, ignoring, mocking and even disallowing the very existence of the One we say we have given our lives to. Now, to be completely honest, I'm not so sure the world is really rejecting Jesus, the Jesus of the Bible, as much as it is rejecting the pathetic expression of Jesus that names itself "the church" or even "A Christian." Interestingly enough, even Jesus rejected those pathetic 'pharisaic' expressions back in the first century! So to answer the question I propose 4 theories: What does it mean to have no interest in the world?

### **1. OUR WORLDVIEW IS DIFFERENT BECAUSE THAT REFLECTS CHRIST**

Jesus prayed on behalf of his disciples in John 17 these words:

*The godless world hated them because of this, because they didn't join the world's ways, just as I didn't join the world's ways. I'm not asking that you take them out of the world, but that you guard them from the Evil One. They are no more defined by the world than I am defined by the world. Make them holy—consecrated—with the truth; your word is consecrating truth. In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world. John 17: 13-19*

Don't you just love that? We are not completely at home in this world, because this world is not our real home! We are citizens of another kingdom, and temporary resident aliens, foreigners here on planet earth. But instead of walking around as one-eyed alien monsters, we actually have a mission in this world. Finding that balance is sometimes difficult; Jesus reminds us to be in the world, but not of the world. I think about my marching band days. I could play ok, and I could march ok, but when I had to do both at the same time...it seems I was always out of step. I think that's what it means to be in this world, but not of it...intentionally, on purpose (God's) out of step with the rest of the world. Much like the coffee bean from last weeks illustration...our job is to give ourselves confidently to the boiling waters about us, and ...to make the water different, to make the world different.

The key phrase in this passage contains the secret: "Make them holy, consecrated – with the truth; your WORD is consecrating truth." My friends the sum reduction of this worlds issues and problems has to do with truth, whose truth, what truth, relative verses absolute truth, dead truth or live truth. It all hinges on truth. We'll be talking more about this in coming weeks, but just know that our (Christian) relationship with this world is ultimately defined by God's Truth..."I Am the Truth".

## **2. OUR VALUES ARE DETERMINED BY WHAT CHRIST VALUES**

We know Jesus valued above almost everything else; people, especially weak, small, suffering people. People who were despised and outcast. He valued truth, we've established that.

He valued honesty and modeled it by the way he treated his most beloved disciples, and the strangers they met along their journeys; and the ways he rejected and reviled against the falsity and perversions of the religious Pharisees. He valued love and a good time, turning water into wine was his first miracle. He understood human weakness, and yet wouldn't allow it to become an excuse for irresponsibility. Our values must reflect what Christ valued.

The apostle Paul gives us a summary clue to what Christ valued:

*Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.* Phil. 4: 8-9

As non-resident aliens living distinctive 'Jesus' lives, our relationship to the world must be determined by things true, noble, lovely, the best not the worst, the beautiful not the ugly. I'm saddened by how many Christian people I know whose outlook and value in life is looking for and finding the negative, the ugly, the worst. Make a decision every day to greet each day: "GOOD MORNING LORD, not Good Lord, Morning!"

### **3. OUR PRIORITIES ARE DEFINED BY WHAT HONORS CHRIST**

Listen again to the Apostle Paul as he describes what God honoring priorities look like:

*Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people: religious, nonreligious, meticulous moralists, loose-living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized—whoever. I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life. I did all this because of the Good News. I didn't just want to talk about it; I wanted to be in on it!*

*You've all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally. I don't know about you, but I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I've got. No sloppy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself.*

I don't know what else to say, but when we survey the cross of Jesus Christ, how can we settle for little living, being defined by what we earn or own. Unfortunately most of the stuff we think we own actually owns us! When we survey the "wondrous...cross", that's a faith-filled oxymoron; how can we settle for cars and houses, boats and golf clubs to define our lives? When we survey the cross upon which Christ died, we can not divorce ourselves; if we are true followers of that same Christ; from the cause for which He died...THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD.

We run with a purpose; those followers of Jesus; to win the lost to Jesus... nothing more...nothing less ought to be our priority. Our family is a tool God gave us to love a spouse and learn about God's love. Our children are given to us so we might help them know God, and they in turn might help theirs and others. Our jobs are tools to support our families, and earn money to grow God's Kingdom. Our lives, 75 years or so are the "spring training" for real life in heaven...so run to win, on purpose...Gods!

#### **4. OUR DECISIONS ARE DECIDED BY WHAT PLEASES CHRIST**

In this world, so filled with demons, devils, and defilements abounding, we must guard the heart of our will, the place where we make decisions. We must cease the silly thought that it's up to us to decide where to go to college, whom to marry, what job to pursue or accept. We must cease the silly thinking that it's up to us to determine what will define our life as a failure or success.

If we would each try, with all the might and power God readily wants to give us, to live our lives in ways that please Jesus, we might be surprised at how easy this living

really is. We make it more difficult thinking we are in control, we are the boss, we are the chairman, or woman of our own destiny. Dead to the world, means we don't live for ourselves any longer.

*Not my will, but thine be done.* Do you remember who said that? Maybe we ought to make it more real in our lives, instead of just a prayer we routinely repeat!

When Mary surveyed the cross she saw her son...she pondered in her heart what his life had become. From her arms to God's and she wept.

When John, the representative disciple surveyed the cross, his heart was filled with disappointment...all they had done...all he had promised, was dying before his eyes.

When the soldiers surveyed the cross they saw a criminal with a robe to be won, and greed was the only thing that filled their eyes. The crowd gathered surveyed the cross and saw a mad man, and mocked him accordingly. One thief saw a miserable, weakling, and surveyed his life to hell that day. Another thief saw a savior, cried out for mercy, and surveyed his life into paradise that day.

A religious Sabbath keeper surveyed the cross and saw a body that had to come down before the sun. Joseph saw a broken body and took it down to be lovingly buried...but not for long, that day!

A centurion soldier surveyed the scene and made a declaration that day..."Surely this was the Son of God." Pilate looked over the basin, surveyed the cross, and washed his hands, while his wife wrung hers.

The God of heaven looked down that day and surveyed the final sacrifice, knowing full well, that as each of us look, as each of us surveys, we must make our own decision. When you survey...the cross...what do you see? Let's sing the hymn.

**THEN SINGS MY SOUL 10**  
**"When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"**

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