

How Sweet the Sound

Remembering Great Hymns of the Faith

June 2009

A Guide for Study and Discussion

And Can It Be

(Free Grace)

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

*Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

He left His Father's throne above
(So free, so infinite His grace!),
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Text: Charles Wesley

Tune: SAGINA, Thomas Campbell

Who wrote And Can It Be?

Charles Wesley.

When did Charles Wesley live?

He was born December 10, 1707 in England. He in England died on March 1788.

Who was Charles Wesley?

Charles Wesley and his brother, John Wesley, are most famous for being the founders of "Methodism."

When Charles was in college at Oxford, he began "the Holy Club" to help students study the Bible and live out what it teaches.

Even though Charles tried very hard to be holy, he was not saved. He was trusting in his religious efforts to save him. He only later became a Christian in 1738.

Charles was a preacher in London, England for most of his life. He was very brave, and once spent an evening locked in a cell with prisoners, so that he could share the Gospel with them.

He and his wife, Sally, had 8 children, though only three lived to adulthood.

What lesson can we learn from Charles Wesley's life?

We should learn that even though we are involved in religious and Christian activities, our good works and attempts to please God cannot save us. We can only be saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Why did Wesley write "And Can It Be"?

He wrote this hymn a few days after becoming a Christian to praise God for the "Free Grace" he found in the Gospel. ("Free Grace" was the original title to the hymn.)

What other hymns did Charles Wesley write?

Wesley wrote almost 6,500 hymns. Some of these are:

- Rejoice, the Lord is King
- O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing
- Hark, the Herald Angels Sing
- Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus
- Christ the Lord is Risen Today

Stanza 1

Recite stanza one.

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

What does it mean to “gain an interest in the Savior’s blood”?

It means to benefit from Jesus' death. He died under God's wrath so that the one who believes in him will not.

What is love?

Love is wanting and doing what is best for someone else. Ultimately, love is helping someone to know and love God. That is what Jesus was doing in his death—helping those who trust in him to be forgiven so that they can have God.

Why is Jesus' love “amazing”?

Because he died for his enemies “who caused his pain.”

Where does the Bible teach this?

Romans 5:6-11 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Stanza 2

Recite stanza two.

He left His Father's throne above
(So free, so infinite His grace!),
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For O my God, it found out me!

What does it mean that Jesus "left His Father's throne above"?

Jesus, God the Son, has been fully God forever. He always existed at God the Father's right hand. He enjoyed sharing the Father's glory and enjoying the Father's presence. When he became man, he left his Father's side to live on earth, though he did not cease to be God in any way.

What is grace?

Grace is favor that we do not deserve. It is when God is kind to us, even though we do not deserve it.

How is this grace free?

It means that we did not do anything to make God be kind to us. Jesus became a man to die for us out of his own good pleasure, not because we earned it.

What does it mean that Jesus "emptied himself"?

It does not mean that Jesus stopped being God in any way. It means that he greatly humbled himself. He is the King of Creation, but he came to live as a servant to all. He is the rightful ruler of all things, but he was born in a stable, washed the feet of sinners and died on a cross. He deserves for everyone to worship him, but he was hated by all.

Paul taught this in Philippians 2:5-8:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

What is mercy?

Mercy is compassion shown to someone who is in a miserable condition. Wesley describes that miserable condition in the third stanza.

Stanza 3

Recite stanza three.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

How are our spirits “imprisoned”?

They are “fast bound”—tied up very tightly—in “sin and nature’s night.”

What is sin?

Sin is disobedience toward God, failure to give him glory.

Are you a sinner?

Yes. The Bible says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The Bible also says that this is our nature by birth, that we are dead in sin, and follow Satan:

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience--³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

How can we get free?

As this stanza says, God must “quicken” us.

What does “quicken” mean?

“Quicken” means to “give life.”

How does God give life to sinners?

He looks on them with life-giving grace through the preaching of the Gospel and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

What happens when a sinner is brought to life?

As the Gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit changes a person's heart. That person is given spiritual sight (faith) to see the promise of salvation in the Gospel. As their heart is changed, they are set free.

Changed by the Holy Spirit, they believe God's promises and follow Jesus Christ.

Stanza 4

Recite stanza 4.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

What is "condemnation"?

To be condemned is to be declared guilty. It is for God to say that you are guilty of sin.

Does the believer need to fear condemnation before God's throne?

No. Jesus—and everything in Jesus—belongs to the believer.

Why is the believer "alive in Jesus"?

Because Jesus is the "head," the representative, of all who trust in him.

Jesus lived a perfect life, without disobeying God once. He loved God the Father perfectly. Jesus then died on the cross for sins. He took the punishment for the sins of others. On the third day, he rose from the dead, having conquered sin and death.

When someone trusts in Jesus, all of this is given to that person. Jesus' perfect, obedient life is counted as the believer's perfect, righteous life. Jesus' death for sins is counted as the believer's death for sins. Jesus' resurrection

from the dead guarantees the believer's resurrection from the dead.

Therefore, if Jesus has died for sins and risen from the dead, those who trust in him are alive in him. They are clothed in his righteousness, in his perfection.

What does this mean for the Christian?

The one who believes in Jesus can be bold and go before God's eternal throne. The Christian can go to God's throne for help through prayer without fear of being rejected. The Christian can go into God's presence at death without fear of being condemned.

What crown does the believer have through Christ?

The believer has the promise of living and reigning with Jesus in his kingdom forever.

How Sweet the Sound

Remembering Great Hymns of the Faith

For 10 months, we as a church family are participating in a season devoted to learning great hymns of the faith. Memorizing hymns is one of the ways we can obey Scripture's command to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16).

We're doing this project because we want to benefit not only from the songs written in our lifetime, but also from hymns that have served the people of God for generations and will endure long after we're gone. They are time-tested and true. They speak to every circumstance of life and point us to the wisdom, love and power of our gracious God and Savior.

Suggestions for Using this Guide

- Family worship – these questions are laid out like a catechism. Wouldn't it be great if your whole family understood the meaning of what they were singing? We aren't suggesting that you memorize these word-for-word, but we do think a good goal would be for you and your children to eventually be able to answer the general sense of the question.
- Ask, answer, and discuss these questions with your family over supper.
- Use these questions and answers in your Sunday School class.
- Use it for personal devotions: After reading a question and answer, think about what it means in your life and pray about that, thanking God or asking Him to apply the truth to your heart and life.