

Study and Discussion Guide for Before the Throne of God Above (The Advocate)

Who wrote “Before the Throne of God Above”?

Charitie Lees Bancroft

When did Charitie Bancroft live?

She was born near Dublin, Ireland in 1841. She died in California in 1923, where she is buried.

What do we know about her life?

Not much is known about her life. She was the daughter of a minister of the Church of Ireland. She published her poetry on leaflets as early as 1860, and had her collected works published in 1867. She was widowed twice.

What do we know about this hymn?

She wrote this hymn in 1863, when she was about 22 years old. It was originally six stanzas long and titled “The Advocate.”

What is an “advocate”?

An advocate is a person who pleads the cause of another, especially before a judicial court.

Who is “the Advocate” written about in this hymn?

Jesus Christ. He pleads the cause of the believer before the throne of God above. In 1 John 2:1, the Apostle John assures believers, “if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Stanza 1

Recite stanza 1.

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea,
A great High Priest whose name is love
Who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on His hands,
My name is written on His heart;
I know that while in heav'n He stands
No tongue can bid me thence depart.

What is “the throne of God above”?

It is the place where God dwells, from which he rules creation and judges his creatures.

Will you ever stand before the throne of God above?

Yes. Hebrews 9:27 teaches that “it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”

Should that frighten us?

Yes. Since we have sinned against God, disobeying his commands and refusing to love him, we deserve to be punished by God forever in hell (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Hebrews 10:30-31 tells us “The Lord will judge his people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

May a sinner have any hope of standing before God’s throne and living?

Yes. The one who trusts in Jesus Christ may enter a “strong and perfect plea” before God. God the Judge finds this plea acceptable and on the basis of it pronounces the sinner to be just and righteous in his sight.

What is this plea?

Our plea is Jesus Christ himself. He is “a great High Priest” who is seated at the right hand of the throne of God in heaven and ministers on behalf of his people (Hebrews 8:1-2).

What is a “High Priest”?

Under the Old Covenant, the high priests went into the holy place of the temple to offer gifts of thanksgiving and sacrifices for sin on behalf of the people.

Jesus the Messiah is “the Great High Priest.” He is the true High Priest and the last High Priest. He does not go into a building built with human hands. He actually goes into God the Father’s very presence.

His name is “love” because his ministry before God’s throne is not one of condemnation but of salvation. He “lives and pleads” for his people, those who trust in him.

What sacrifice for sins does Jesus the Great High Priest offer?

He offers one perfect sacrifice—himself. During his life on earth, Jesus was holy, without sin, and perfectly pleasing to God the Father. Then he died as a sacrifice in the place of sinners when he was crucified.

In the shedding of his own blood, Christ offered himself without blemish to God to purify those who believe in him. His death redeems believers from their sin, making them holy for all time, so that no other offering for sin needs to be made (Hebrews 9:14-15; 10:10-18).

What does it mean that “my name is graven on His hands, my name is written on his heart”?

It means two things: First, it reminds us that the High Priest will never, ever forget his people.

We look at our hands every day. We cannot forget what is on them. So, the High Priest has written the names of his people on his hands, and remembers them always (Isaiah 49:16).

Our heart is the center of our affections, the place from which we love. The Great High Priest not only always remembers his people, but he always loves them.

Second, this reminds us of wounds that the High Priest received to redeem his people. When his blood was shed as a sacrifice, nails were put through his hands and a spear was plunged into his side. Though he rose from the dead, he still bears the scars of these wounds (John 20:27; Revelation 5:6). These wounds are an eternal reminder to God the Father and to Jesus the High Priest that full payment has been made for sin.

They also remind and assure the believer that his sins are paid for and that he may with confidence draw near to the throne of grace (not condemnation!) and find mercy and grace in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).

What assurance does this give the Christian?

"I know that while in heaven he stands no tongue can bid me thence depart."

As long as Jesus Christ, who died and rose, is interceding for his people at God's right hand, no one can bring a charge against them, no one can separate them from God's presence and love.

Romans 8:31-39 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Is there anyone in particular who would try to separate God from his people?

Yes. Satan hates God and his people.

Stanza 2

Recite stanza 2.

When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died
My sinful soul is counted free,
For God, the Just, is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me.

Who is Satan?

Satan is the devil, a fallen angel who hates God and continually opposes his glory. Satan has always attempted to get God's people to rebel and forsake the Lord (Genesis 3; 1 Chronicles 21:1; Job 1-2; Luke 22:31-32).

"Satan" means "the Accuser." "Devil" means "slanderer." Satan attempts to destroy God's people by accusing them of sin and unrighteousness before God (Zechariah 3:1; Revelation 12:10).

Satan attempts to cause God's people to despair of salvation and God's love by telling them of their "guilt within."

How is Satan conquered and the Devil resisted?

Satan is conquered through the shed blood of the risen High Priest. He is resisted by trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

The Lord himself rebukes Satan by pointing to the sacrifice that removes iniquity and clothes his people in righteousness (Zechariah 3:1-5).

Believers conquer that ancient serpent by trusting in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 12:11). They resist the Slanderer and answer the Accuser by looking "upward" and trusting that before the throne of God stands the one who "made an end" of all their sin (Acts 7:55-56).

How did the Great High Priest make an end of sin?

John continues in 1 John 2:1-2 to tell us that our advocate is "the propitiation for our sins." That means that his sacrifice bears and satisfies God's just anger and wrath. Having satisfied God's wrath, his sacrifice turns it to favor. Through Christ, God is for us, not against us.

The Apostle Paul wrote that "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This means that God treated the sin of his people as though it belonged to Jesus, even though he never sinned. He punished Christ for that sin on the cross (1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:4,5,6,11,12). If the penalty for sin is paid, atoned for, then sin has no power. In his death, Christ "made an end of sin." Therefore, the "sinful soul" of the believer is "counted free" from the penalty of sin.

What does God, the Just, think of this?

God is Just. And since, by his own design, Jesus Christ made full payment for sin, God is satisfied to look at Jesus' death and pronounce believers in Jesus to be pardoned, fully forgiven and released from the penalty for sin.

What does this mean for the believer's standing before God?

In Christ, the believer pronounced "forgiven," God declares him to be "righteous." As Paul wrote, we "become the righteousness of God."

Just as God counts sin as belonging to Jesus—and treats Jesus as a sinner on the cross—God counts the righteousness of the Jesus as belonging to the believer—and treats him as a righteous son.

Jesus, therefore, is the believer's "perfect, spotless righteousness."

Stanza 3

Recite stanza 3.

Behold Him there! the risen Lamb,
My perfect, spotless righteousness,
The great unchangeable I AM,
The King of Glory and of Grace.
One with Himself I cannot die;
My soul is purchased by His blood,
My life is hid with Christ on high,
With Christ my Savior and my God.

What should the attitude of the believer be?

The believer should always be looking “upward” to “behold Him there.” The believer should constantly remind himself that the risen Lamb stands before the throne of God above as his perfect, spotless righteousness.

What does it mean that Christ is “the risen Lamb”?

Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). He is the true Passover Lamb. God’s wrath “passes over” and does not touch those who are covered in his blood.

Though the Lamb was slaughtered, he was raised from the dead to live and reign forever (Rev 5:6).

What comfort does this give the believer?

As long as he is there—before God’s throne—to plead for the believer, the believer is secure.

Will the Lamb ever cease to be the believer’s perfect plea and righteousness?

No! He is “the great unchangeable I AM.” He never changes. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

If I believe and trust in Jesus Christ, he is always and forever my perfect plea, my spotless righteousness, that God is pleased to look on and pardon me.

Is Jesus Christ “the great I AM”?

Yes. He is the Word who is “with God” also “is God” (John 1:1). Jesus Christ is “the King of Glory and of Grace.”

He is the King who reigns forever (Revelation 22:3). He is the lamp of the glory of God—the person in whom we see God’s glory perfectly (Revelation 21:23). He is a gracious King, who wipes away every tear from the eyes of his people (Revelation 21:4).

How does this comfort the believer?

If Christ is the eternal God who will live forever and if I am “one” with him, then I cannot die. He has purchased me. Therefore, my life is bound up with him and is where he is (Colossians 3:3-4).

If Christ is both my Savior and my God, then I will live and reign with him forever (Revelation 21:4; 22:5).