

Joy and Wonder at God's Infinite Mercy

- 1 And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest 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?
- 2 'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love Divine!
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.
- 3 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.
- 4 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.
- 5 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.
(Hymns, #296)

The history of the church is the history of God's mercy, grace, love, and power. Human beings, once the prisoners of sin, having become wretched ruins through the pernicious activities of the darkness perpetrated by the rebellious angels, can now be redeemed, uplifted, and constituted with the glory of God, the One who richly cares for them. In Ephesians 2:2-3 the apostle Paul, after first glorying in the phenomenal blessings which have been bestowed on the chosen people of God, describes our previous woeful condition, a condition which we experienced together with all humanity, saying,

You once walked according to the age of this world,
according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the

spirit which is now operating in the sons of disobedience; among whom we also all conducted ourselves once in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Ephesians is the utterance of a man who caught a glimpse of the wonder of God's eternal purpose, the heart's desire and the accompanying mercy and grace of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ toward us, His chosen and beloved people. It is an unveiling of the infinite mercy, the surpassing grace, the unlimited love, and the wondrous splendor of God who planned and purposed to join Himself to humanity and bring His chosen and redeemed people into a harmonious and intimate union in life with Himself through the eternal Son. This is not merely the depiction of a rescue from the perdition of eternal destruction; it opens the vista of the Father's loving purpose to produce a new creation that is holy and without blemish, chosen by God to be His many sons reflecting His eternal glory. These chosen are not simply scattered individuals who have received eternal redemption; rather, they are built together in life to constitute a corporate organic entity which, as the masterpiece of God, displays His wisdom, power, and glory as the church. For eternity this group will stand as a memorial to "display in the ages to come the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness" (v. 7). The apostle manifestly proclaims the incredible wonder of His loving grace toward His chosen believers who once were dead in sin and unrighteousness:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in offenses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up together with Him and seated us together with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, that He might display in the ages to come the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works that no one should boast. For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand in order that we would walk in them. (vv. 4-10)

Against the negative background of sin, the masterpiece of God is described intricately and beautifully as the apostle opens the vistas of the divine purpose, which is according to His own good pleasure and will. The Father is heading up all things in Christ. He is constituting a group of redeemed persons into the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. He has created them into one new man, He is making of them a family, a household of faith, and He is building them into a holy temple in the Lord. Furthermore, He is making known through them, as His church, the multifarious wisdom of His eternal purpose. Ultimately, they will “all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (4:13). Through this process, the sinners who have become the many sons of God are being built together by building themselves up as the Body of Christ in love.

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, opens the vast riches of the salvation of God and its ultimate manifestation in the many sons of God. The history of the church through the ages is the outworking of this rich grace of God. It is not merely a chronicle concerning the exploits of men of faith who appeared on the scene of time for a brief moment and then passed into the obscurity of death and darkness. Rather, it is an account of the one unique corporate masterpiece of God. God is working in each individual believer, and each one will be perfectly harmonized with the whole in the beauty of His perfect artistry. Each one will testify of His eternal wisdom and workmanship. Each one will emerge from his unique background of darkness, sin, and death, and each one will advance from glory to glory into a consummate display of the divine sonship according to the operation of God within him to the glory of the Father.

The Loftiness of God’s Purpose in Man

Until a person touches the loftiness of God’s purpose in man, he would never guess what the glorious hope of the revelation is, but in 1 Corinthians 2:9, the apostle Paul spoke of “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not come up in man’s heart; things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” In all of humankind’s dreams and imaginations, during our many marvelous and amazing discoveries, it never occurred to any human being that God created man with the express intention of becoming organically joined to Him so that he could become a participant in the glory of God for His expression and satisfaction. Only God can reveal such

hidden mystery. Hence, the psalmist marveled in amazement, “When I see Your heavens, the works of Your fingers, / The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, / What is mortal man, that You remember him, / And the son of man, that You visit him?” (Psa. 8:3-4).

When Charles Wesley composed the first line of this hymn, he surely was affected by the same awe and amazement at the love of God. Is it possible that the Son of God could have died for me? How could the shedding of the blood of Jesus centuries ago become a saving factor for me today? Why would He empty Himself of all but love and come to die for “Adam’s helpless race”? It was to Wesley, as it is to us today, a divinely conceived, accomplished, and orchestrated fact that indeed it is God’s purpose and desire to redeem and bring forth a people to Himself, and that the redemption of this chosen race has

been accomplished through the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son. With a sense of praise and admiration for such a splendid salvation, this hymn sets forth the wonder and the joy in the soul and spirit of those who are the heirs of salvation.

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The Amazing Wonder: “Died He for Me?”

When Wesley penned this hymn, he echoed the central theme of the Bible in relation to God’s act of redemption. Our Savior God came, descending from eternity and glory into time and into the constraints of His own creation with the express intention of pouring out His blood in order to purchase to Himself a people according to His own good pleasure: “Who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify to Himself a particular people as His unique possession” (Titus 2:14). Under the light of this revelation, the writer seems to muse over this astonishing thought: Is it plausible, let alone possible, that I should gain some kind of interest, benefit, and even participation in the inestimable worth of my Savior’s blood? The hymn develops into a resounding affirmation of this divinely accomplished redemption and its effectiveness.

Stanza 1 begins with an expression of wonder concerning the revelation in the Word of God involving our eternal salvation through the blood of our Savior God: “And can it be that I should gain / An int’rest in the Savior’s blood?” In this question there is a ringing assurance of the rich supply and the firm source of our full salvation. The thought that the shedding of Christ’s blood some two thousand years ago is our unique means of salvation may seem to some to be an outdated belief, but to us who are

being saved, it is the concrete foundation and the genuine rock of our salvation. It is forever established as a fixed underpinning to all our experiences of fellowship with God and to the overcoming of the enemy of God, Satan. It is determined by God in His wisdom and received by those who simply believe:

Since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe. For indeed Jews require signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles 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. (1 Cor. 1:21-25)

The Scriptures are replete with the simple yet profound fact concerning the absolute need for and the effectiveness of the blood of Christ in our salvation. Peter strongly testifies, "It was not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, that you were redeemed from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers, but with precious blood, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). The author of the book of Hebrews makes a compelling argument that it is clear that the blood of bulls and goats prescribed in the Old Testament are a sign and type of the much more effective blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. He articulates the significance of the blood of our Redeemer in the opening to us of an entrance into the second "tabernacle," the Holiest Place, signifying our New Testament experience of intimate fellowship with God:

Christ, having come as a High Priest of the good things that have come into being, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not of this creation, and not through the blood of goats and calves but through His own blood, entered once for all into the Holy of Holies, obtaining an eternal redemption. (Heb. 9:11-12)

According to the biblical witness, the blood of goats and bulls offered in Old Testament times did have some effect of sanctifying the worshippers to the purity of the flesh. Although those Old Testament offerings were able to make the Jewish believers acceptable before God, they are "unable to perfect, according to conscience, him who worships" (v. 9). Hence, these Old Testament offerings were "a figure for the present time" (v. 9). Now, Christ has come and entered into a greater and more perfect tabernacle which is from above. This greater tabernacle is quite mysterious. In 10:19 we are urged to have "boldness for entering the Holy of Holies in the blood of Jesus, which entrance He initiated for us as a new and living way through the veil, that is, His flesh." The way into God has

been fully opened by the precious blood of Jesus, His Son. We have such an interest in our Savior's blood; He has opened the way for us! Now we are able to enter at will into God and enjoy a living fellowship with Him; this way is new and living. The means by which we can practically experience such intimate fellowship with Him in the present age is explained in a footnote in the Recovery Version of the Bible:

The Holy of Holies today is in heaven, where the Lord Jesus is (9:12, 24). How, then, can we enter the Holy of Holies while we are still on earth? The secret is our spirit, referred to in 4:12. The very Christ who is in heaven is now also in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). As the heavenly ladder (Gen. 28:12; John 1:51), He joins our spirit to heaven and brings heaven into our spirit. Hence, whenever we turn to our spirit, we enter into the Holy of Holies. There we meet with God, who is on the throne of grace. (Heb. 10:19, note 1)

The blood of Jesus is, then, the fixed base and the inexhaustible supply of our practical experiences of forgiveness of sins, cleansing of conscience, overcoming of Satan, and our subsequent entrance into the full enjoyment of fellowship with God (cf. 1 John 1:3-9).

"How Can it Be / That Thou, My God, Shouldst Die for Me?"

As the hymn develops, the writer ponders over the cause for Christ's death, that is, the reason for such a seemingly extreme action on the part of the redeeming God in order to carry out redemption. Was our sinfulness, our condition before a holy and righteous God, of such degradation that it required His death? "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?" Did He really die for me? And is it possible that God would die for me?

The Holy Scriptures unveil the process of God passing through death in the Son to redeem His chosen people. Acceptance in faith of this divinely planned and executed event in God's economy is the indispensable requirement for man to be saved (cf. John 3:18). We must recognize the price that was paid and have faith in His shed blood (1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rom. 3:25).

The Lord's death on the cross achieved a full salvation which reaches and encompasses the uttermost part of humanity. He died on behalf of all. The apostle John writes, "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2). His shed blood is effective to the ends of the earth and to the limit of time

and beyond. God is not willing for any to perish; He desires that all men would be saved and come to the full knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). There is no sin too great, and there is no sinner so corrupt or degraded that the blood of Jesus cannot cleanse and purge him of his sins.

Many have rejected the thought of an eternal redemption. They prefer to attribute to Christ the “nobler” death of a martyr—a “wayshower” who died in the dignity of a holy man. But God in His salvation has chosen to bring sinners to Himself by becoming a lowly man, despised and rejected. He was a man of sorrows, and in His death on the cross there was no glory. Rather, He was crucified in humiliation and infamy. He was discredited, disgraced, dishonored by men, and He was forsaken and judged as sin itself in the eyes of God, not because of failures and sins on His part but because of the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). He was made sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). We must embrace the fact that it was essential that Christ die for us. Otherwise, we are still in our sins.

Second, we must come to terms with the fact that the One who passed through death is God. He is not simply a prophet or some kind of mysterious seer. Some have refused to accept the fact that Jesus possesses the divine life and nature as well as the human life and nature. The Pharisees angrily sought to put Him to death because He claimed to be the Son of God, thus “making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18). In a sense, their accusations were correct, for He proclaimed Himself to be the very Jehovah of the Old Testament—God Himself. Three times it is recorded in John 8 that He identified Himself as the “I am” revealed in Exodus 3; He told the Pharisees, “Unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).

Third, we must believe that He was a genuine man. Not only is His deity a central fact revealed in the divine revelation, but His humanity is equally attested. He was God from eternity to eternity, but in time He became a man, the same as we are except without sin. Without genuine humanity, He could never have become our Savior; the Scriptures say that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. Without becoming a man, He could never have poured out His own precious blood on our behalf. In contrast to the activities of the Old Testament priests to apply the blood of bulls and goats for the expiation of sins, our Savior removed sin by dying on our behalf and entering into the eternal Holy of Holies with His own blood to satisfy God and to open a way for us to enter.

“’Tis Mystery All! The Immortal Dies!”

Stanza 2 continues, “’Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies! / Who can explore His strange design?” In a mysterious but very real sense, God passed through death. This is the testimony conveyed by Paul to the elders from Ephesus (Acts 20:28). As the God-man Savior, God purchased us with His own blood to be the church, the testimony to God in the earth. As we have already noted, there is among many Christians today a general and vague concept of redemption. But Peter emphasizes with intense feeling and clarity, we are redeemed with the “precious blood” of Christ. Earlier, Peter had declared strongly, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). So also Paul affirms that what took place when Christ poured out His blood on the cross was a thorough dealing with the problem of sin—

the freeing from both the defilement and the guilt of sin. We have been set free from all condemnation and accusation—the blood of the crucified God-man purifies our conscience from dead works (Heb. 9:14). All our attempts to please God by our own efforts are vain, but through the blood of Jesus, our conscience is freed from

dead works to serve the living God. We are no longer in a form of religious slavery trying to serve a “dead” god with dead works. Hallelujah! The blood of our Savior God has removed all the corruption, stain, and even the power of sin, releasing us from religious duty to live and serve in the preciousness of Christ Jesus, who is God manifested in the flesh.

Surely, it is a great mystery that the “Immortal dies.” How can one who is eternal, enduring, and never-ending die? God in His divinity, of course, can never die. But in His humanity, before He had conquered death, the Lord Jesus—God incarnated in the flesh (John 1:14)—was subject to death; that is, He had to pass through death in order to accomplish redemption. By passing through death He also conquered the one who has the might of death, the devil (cf. Heb. 2:14). Hence, He was not only a man with blood, but He was also God with the resurrection life that transcends the power and authority of darkness and death. Therefore, the Word proclaims: “Christ also has suffered once for sins, the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, on the one hand being put to death in the flesh, but on the other, made alive in the Spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18). He was put to death in the flesh of His humanity, but He was made alive in the Spirit of His divinity.

The way into God has been fully opened by the precious blood of Jesus. Now we are able to enter at will into God and enjoy a living fellowship with Him.

Praise and Honor to Him Who Left His Father's Throne to Die for Adam's Helpless Race

Stanza 3 is filled with praise, honor, and blessing to the wonderful One who abandoned His eternal place in glory to become a man and who as a man died on behalf of all men. This stanza parallels Paul's high esteem and utmost admiration of Christ expressed in Philippians 2:5-8:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal with God a treasure to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross.

So the hymnist rejoices: "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." At the end of stanza 3 the writer breaks forth in rapturous delight: "'Tis mercy all, immense and free; / For, O my God, it found out me." He has become a participant in the wondrous act of Christ's redemption. He has been "found out" by the mercy of His Savior's unsearchable exploit. This word of elated joy flows into stanza 4 in which he testifies of his experience of God's salvation: "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." Wesley's speaking is modeled after the experience of Peter in Acts 12:6-11 in which Peter was in prison awaiting an audience with and probable execution by Herod.

And when Herod was about to bring him forward, that night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and guards before the door were keep-

ing the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shined in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and roused him, saying, Rise up quickly. And his chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, Gird yourself and tie on your sandals. And he did so. And he said to him, Throw your cloak around you and follow me.

The physical deliverance of Peter from the prison of Herod was to Wesley a picture of his spiritual release from the oppression and captivity of Satan.

Alive in Him and Clothed in Righteousness Divine

In stanza 5 Wesley speaks of the experience of a believer who has entered into the eternal salvation provided by the incarnated, crucified, and risen Savior, an experience that begins with the revelation of the first thought recorded by the apostle Paul in Romans 8:1: "no condemnation." The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, Paul testifies, has freed us from the law of sin and of death (v. 2). The death of the God-man Savior has brought in a new order—"Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!" We can proclaim, "I am alive in Him! He is my living Head. Life is my portion, and righteousness is my clothing. I have the right to approach the eternal throne and claim the crown through Christ my living Head and my eternal covering of righteousness." This should be the experience of every believer who has put his trust in the saving grace of our Lord Jesus who is not only the One who bled for Adam's helpless race but also the One who is now the present source of our life and living.

by Gary Kaiser

Works Cited

Lee, Witness. Footnotes. Recovery Version of the Bible. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 2003.

Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own **blood**" (Acts 20:28).

blood: Indicating the precious love of God for the church and the preciousness, the exceeding worth, of the church in the eyes of God. Here the apostle did not touch the divine life and nature of the church as in Eph. 5:23-32, but the value of the church as a treasure to God, a treasure which He acquired with His own precious blood. Paul expected that the elders as overseers would treasure the church as God did.

Both the Holy Spirit and God's own blood are divine provisions for the church that He treasures. The Holy Spirit is God Himself, and God's own blood denotes God's work. God's redemptive work acquired the church; now God Himself, the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), cares for the church through the overseers.

God's own blood is the blood of Jesus Christ. This implies that the Lord Jesus is God.