**FAVORITE HYMNS**

***The Old Rugged Cross***

Unless you were raised in a barn or lived under a rock you have surely heard the great classic hymn *The Old Rugged Cross*. It has been listed among the top 10 most sung spiritual songs for almost 100 years. It first became nationally known in the 1920’s when popular evangelist Billy Sunday used it in his great preaching campaigns around the country.

It was written by a Methodist preacher named George Bennard in 1913 when he was 40 years old. While he was preaching in Michigan he was ridiculed by a group of young boys for his beliefs. This caused him to reflect on those beliefs by meditating on Philippians 2, and in particular verses 5-8. In that powerful text we see a quick timeline of Christ in heaven choosing to come to earth as a man and there He “*humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross*.” The image of the cross kept going through his mind until he had penned the first line:

“On a hill far away, stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame…”

Genesis 22.

An old man – perhaps 110 to 120 – along with a young boy – perhaps a pre-teen or a teen, but still strong enough to carry firewood – climbed up the hill. The old man was in a brooding mood. The son asked, “Father, here is the wood for our sacrifice, but where is the animal that we will kill?” All the dad could say was, “God will provide the lamb.”

You know the rest of the story. The boy – named Isaac – was tied to that altar on that famous hill. The knife was raised to kill him. The angel spoke to stay the execution. The lamb was found in the thicket. God praised Abraham for his faith. All’s well that ends well.

I Chronicles 21.

Travel forward one thousand years to that same hill. A king stood to bargain for a small piece of this ground with a man named Ornan. King David had sinned by numbering the warriors of his army against the command of God. A plague had broken out and thousands were dying because of this sin. David had volunteered to die in the place of these people, but God had instead demanded a sacrifice on this hill. When it was offered, God stayed the plague and thousands were saved.

I Chronicles 22.

David’s son Solomon also came to this hill. Here he built the Temple to God. Here is where hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of sacrificial lambs were offered to appease the wrath of God against sin. It was the very spot where the Presence of God could be found for Israel, His covenant people. For it was here that sin found its remedy in lambs being sacrificed.

Luke 22.

Travel forward again one thousand years - just outside the gates on this same Hill – where another altar of sacrifice was erected. It was a strange altar made of two beams of wood. On it another Father took His Son to be sacrificed. But this time, something different happened. The stay of execution was not offered, and the Son became the sacrificial Lamb. In fact, the Lamb looked up into the eyes of His Father and cried out, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me*?” To stop the plague caused by sin, the Son of God became the Lamb of God.

That Hill came to be known in Hebrew as Golgotha – the place of the Skull. In Greek it is called Calvary. Some call it Mount Zion. Others call it Mount Moriah (“the Lord will provide”). In a geographical sense that Hill is insignificant. It’s just a piece of dirt and rock. In a spiritual sense that Hill is the focus of our faith and the central moment of human history. Figuratively we climb that mountain with our hands empty, bringing no wood or animal to sacrifice. God has provided all the necessary things for the appeasement of His wrath to be satisfied. All we are asked to do is “*Remember Me*.” Then, climb down from that Hill and give our bodies as living sacrifices for Him.

On that historically famous hill we now see mind-boggling paradoxes:

1. The cross is both the most tragic event in history, yet the most wonderful.

2. The cross is both the saddest spectacle ever seen, yet our greatest joy.

3. The cross was both Satan’s greatest victory, yet his most stunning defeat.

4. The cross is where God both condemned sin, yet proved His love for sinners.

5. The cross was both man’s darkest hour, yet man’s brightest light to draw men to God.

6. The cross was both the greatest exhibition of Divine justice, yet the most wonderful

demonstration of Divine mercy.

When we are mocked and ridiculed for our beliefs as disciples of Christ it is good that we, like George Bennard, also reflect on Philippians 2:5-11 and think of what the cross means to us. It puts every taunt by our enemies into eternal perspective. It reminds us that on that hill we remember Abraham’s greatest act of faith, David’s penitent plea for mercy, Solomon’s Temple of God’s presence, and Christ’s six hours of suffering and death. It is no wonder that reflections on that far away hill caused Mr. Bennard, and now us, to kneel at the cross, then stand to sing:

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame;  
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain.

O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world, has a wondrous attraction for me;

For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above to bear it to dark Calvary.

In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine, a wonderous beauty I see;

For ‘twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died to pardon and sanctify me.

To the old rugged cross I will ever be true, Its shame and reproach gladly bear;

Then He’ll call me some day to my home far away, where His glory forever I’ll share.

Chorus: So I'll cherish the old rugged cross (rugged cross), Till my trophies at last I lay down;  
I will cling to the old rugged cross, And exchange it some day for a crown

Let us take up our cross and follow Him. - Rick