**FAVORITE HYMNS**

***When I Survey The Wondrous Cross***

In our study of Favorite Hymns the list would not be complete without a song from Isaac Watts. Mr. Watts wrote over 750 spiritual hymns during his life, giving him the deserved title among scholars of Christian music “The Father of English Hymns.”

Isaac Watts was born in 1674 and died at the age of 74 in 1748. He received a great education and seemed destined to become an accomplished minister in London, England. However, his health soon broke, causing him to “retire” to the home of Sir Thomas Abbey, where he lived the last 36 years of his life. This generous offer provided him the opportunity to study and write. He took full advantage of this by publishing many religious books. But his greatest work was in the writing of those 750 hymns.

In his day he revolutionized the way hymns were composed. Remember he wrote his songs 300 years ago. Back then most churches would simply have a “song leader” chant a line of an Old Testament Psalm, and the church would recite it back. No songs gave the members opportunity to express their love and devotion to their savior Jesus Christ since they were rooted in the Psalms. Young Isaac wanted the church to sing together, and to sing about Christ. One day, when he was just 18, he complained to his father about the poor quality of these hymns, claiming they were not “inspirational enough.” He stopped Isaac by saying, “Well son, if you think you can do better, go ahead.” The rest, as they say, is history. He sure did “do better.” Just pause for a few minutes and sing a few of his hymns from memory (or from a hymnal if you need an aid). You will quickly see what I mean.

* Come We That Love The Lord (we sang often in my youth but seldom today)
* Alas And Did My Savior Bleed
* I’m Not Ashamed To Own My Lord
* Joy To The World
* We’re Marching To Zion
* The Lord My Shepherd Is
* At The Cross At The Cross Where I First Saw The Light

I love so many of Mr. Watts songs because he makes them in the first and second person, not the third person. To know what that means just read those titles above and see the personal pronouns (“*we … my … I’m … we’re … my*”), not third person “*you … they … them*.” His hymns ask something of *me*. They make my faith so personal. When I sing them I feel a relationship, a friendship, a fellowship, with the Lord Jesus Christ.

But it is my favorite Watts hymn that I want to write about now. *When I Survey The Wondrous Cross* is considered by many experts the greatest hymn ever written. He wrote it in 1707 when he was 33 years old, the same age of his Lord when He died at Calvary. He felt that kinship of age as he penned this beautiful song for the church to sing as they partook of the Lord’s Supper. Let’s sing it together. Pitch pipe: key of F. Hmmmm. “When I …”

**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.**

“I … my … me … mine.” It’s as if it is just Jesus and me.

Picture the apostle John, standing at the foot of the cross, watching the Prince of glory die. Now, for a moment, take John’s place. *I* hear Him groan, “*Father, forgive them, they know not what they do*.” *I* hear Him turn to the thief and lovingly whisper through His agonizing pain, “*Today, you will be with Me in paradise*.” *I* (like John) think back to the days I argued with the others as to who was greatest in the kingdom and feel so ashamed of my pride. *I* resolve, no more boasting, save in the death of Christ my God. *I* see the blood from the thorns in His head, the nails in His hands and feet, all dripping into the dirt at my feet. *I* then look up and see Him, while gasping for air, lovingly smile at me. *I* weep as I think, “did ever such love and sorrow meet?” *I* make a promise right then, “My Lord, from this day forward, You have my soul, my life, my all!”

Isaac Watts wrote this song while meditating on Galatians 6:14.
*“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”*

It is likely he was also remembering Galatians 2:20.
*“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*

Those two verses, combined in the singing of this 300 year-old hymn, would be a good way to partake of the Lord’s Supper this Sunday. But wouldn’t it also be a powerful way to live your life today? My hope and prayer is that these few moments we have spent together have helped us to remember who we are, and to remember Who we serve.

Let us pray: “Dear Father, please help me today to survey the cross and determine with all my heart that it’s not about me, but You, and Him. Today, I give my soul, my life, my all to serving You. In Jesus’ name, that name above all names, Amen.”

I love you Jesus. Thank you for loving me first. - Rick