

In the Cross of Christ I Glory

1.1 In the cross of Christ I glory,
1.2 Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
1.3 All the light of sacred story
1.4 Gathers round its head sublime.

2.1 When the woes of life o'ertake me,
2.2 Hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
2.3 Never shall the cross forsake me:
2.4 Lo, it glows with peace and joy.

3.1 When the sun of bliss is beaming
3.2 Light and love upon my way,
3.3 From the cross the radiance streaming
3.4 Adds new luster to the day.

4.1 Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
4.2 By the cross are sanctified;
4.3 Peace is there that knows no measure,
4.4 Joys that through all time abide.

Words: John Bowring, 1825

Music: *Rathbun* by Ithamar Conkey, 1849

The hymn starts out very promising as it echoes the words of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 6:14, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” But the it quickly stumbles with a vague abstraction, “wrecks of time” (1.2). The first stanza ends with an image of light around the “head” of the cross (1.4), whatever part that indicates, which is sublime for some obscure reason.

The second stanza brings up woes, deceitful hopes, and annoying fears (perhaps fears of gnats buzzing around ears?). But the cross “glows” (2.4) with “peace and joy”. I can't help but imagine a plastic lighted cross glowing in the dark. The next stanza jumps to the opposite extreme as the “sun of bliss” beams (3.1) and the writer seems to be singing “Everything's Coming My Way.” Here the cross “Adds more luster” just like some soap commercials. The last stanza promises the cross will sanctify everything, give peace without measure (4.3), and joy for all time.

Nowhere in the hymn does the writer say *why* the cross is so special. The closest he comes is the reference to “sacred story”, but this is so fleeting the hymn comes to little more than an exercise in religious feeling.

In short, the words of this hymn are so weak there’s not much worth saving. The lines that include the word “cross” are about all I could save in the re-write below (I can’t call it a revision since so much is changed). Here the meaning of the cross is brought to remembrance, how it applies to the writer (or singer), and how this brings reassurance of God’s guidance, faithfulness, care, sanctification, and hope.

In the Cross of Christ I Glory

In the cross of Christ I glory,
Where the Lord was crucified;
Through the light of Jesus’ story
This will ever be my guide.

Jesus gave his life to save me
From the burden of my sin;
Never shall the cross forsake me,
There he died my soul to win.

When the ways of doubt are scheming,
News of darkness fills the air,
From the cross the radiance streaming
Of God’s love reveals his care.

Days of life, so transitory,
By the cross are sanctified;
Christ in us, the hope of glory,
Now and evermore abide.

Original: John Bowring, 1825
Rewrite: R. Gillmann, 2009