

My Hope is Built

My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not seek another frame,
but wholly trust in Jesus' name.

Refrain:

On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness makes a fearful face,
I rest on his unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale,
His anchor holds me without fail.

Refrain

His word, his spirit, and his blood,
Support me in the mounting flood.
When all around my life gives way,
He still remains my hope and stay.

Refrain

When he shall come with trumpet sound,
Yea, may I then in him be found.
Dressed in his righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.

Refrain

Edward Mote, 1834
R. Gillmann, rev. 2008

My Hope is Built – Commentary

This hymn written by Edward Mote in 1834 was revised in 2008 by R. Gillmann.

The hymn alternates between affirmations of faith and indications of danger. What is the overall imagery of the hymn? Words such as “built” and “frame” in the first stanza and the “solid Rock” refrain show a building metaphor and an allusion to the words of Christ recorded in Mt. 7:

24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

The middle two stanzas have nautical imagery, such as “high and stormy gale”, “anchor”, “flood”, and “stay” (in the sense of a guy rope). The final stanza alludes to the second coming of Christ with its “trumpet” and “throne” of judgment. The other main allusion seems to be Heb. 6:

16 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain [veil], 20 where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

However, as with many hymns, the imagery is somewhat jumbled and obscure. For example, what is the “sweetest frame” in the first stanza? Nowadays, one might think of a beautiful woman but that is probably not the author’s intention, which in any case is not developed. An anchor behind a veil is not a helpful image. “His oath” in the third stanza is also not further developed—there is no allusion to confirmation or promise, for example.

This hymn has been altered over the years, though the revisions have only addressed some of its shortcomings and have shortcomings of their own. For instance, for the third line of the first stanza:

No merit of my own I claim

This takes away the obscure “sweetest frame” but lacks the building allusion of “frame”. It lacks the double negative of the original which echoes the first verse. The reference to “merit” comes out of nowhere and is not developed. The next revised line:

But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.

What does it mean to lean on a name? Is a name like a building?

Let’s look at my revision:

- 1.1 My hope is built on nothing less
- 1.2 Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.
- 1.3 I dare not seek another frame,
- 1.4 But wholly trust in Jesus’ name.

Refrain:

On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

- 2.1 When darkness makes a fearful face,
- 2.2 I rest on his unchanging grace.
- 2.3 In every high and stormy gale,
- 2.4 His anchor holds me without fail.

Refrain

- 3.1 His word, his spirit, and his blood,
- 3.2 Support me in the mounting flood.
- 3.3 When all around my life gives way,
- 3.4 He still remains my hope and stay.

Refrain

- 4.1 When he shall come with trumpet sound,
- 4.2 Yea, may I then in him be found.
- 4.3 Dressed in his righteousness alone,
- 4.4 Faultless to stand before the throne.

Refrain

Consider the revisions made here:

- 1.3 I dare not seek another frame,

This change retains the building allusion of “frame” and simply states that nothing else will do.

- 2.1 When darkness makes a fearful face,

This heightens the potential danger instead of the weak religious convention of Jesus’ veiled face.

- 2.4 His anchor holds me without fail.

It is his anchor, not mine, that holds. The underdeveloped “veil” is removed in favor of an unfailing Savior.

- 3.1 His word, his body, and his blood,
- 3.2 Support me in the mounting flood.

His word and body are more concrete supports against the “mounting” rather than archaic “whelming” flood.

- 3.3 When all around my life gives way,
- 3.4 He still remains my hope and stay.

It is the circumstances of “my life” that may give way rather than the state of “my soul”. It is not only “then” but always that he is “my hope and stay”.

- 4.2 Yea, may I then in him be found.

In 4.2 the weak “oh” is replaced by a more confident “Yea”.

The other parts are retained for continuity with the original text.