

The Hymns We Sing  
Sermons on the Great Hymns  
O Sacred Head, Now Wounded

*With Study Questions*

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# O Sacred Head, Now Wounded

Matthew 27:29

## **Pondering the Cross**

In this hymn, written by Bernard of Clairvaux in 1153, we are summoned to ponder the passion of Christ upon the cross. We might just as easily seek to excavate the Andes with a plastic fork as to plumb the depths of the grief, glory, and victory of Calvary; yet there is no greater pursuit for the creature than to seek to uncover the mercy and justice of his Creator. And there is no greater event than the cross of Christ to give us a display of these glorious attributes.

The hymn begins where the gospels end, the crucifixion of Jesus.

*O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down*

## **Put to Shame**

Though Christ was born innocent and lived a life of innocence, His mission on this fallen globe would necessarily find Him hanging on a cross. Jesus was despised and rejected by men; He was a Man of sorrows acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). Over and above Jesus coming to provide an example of pristine human living or minister faultless instruction, He came to die. The Man who had no shame was put to shame. The apostles came to view the fellowship of this shame as a great honor.

**...and when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. <sup>41</sup> So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (Acts 5:40-41).**

## **Not Put to Shame**

Perhaps their willingness to be put to shame was embraced because they knew that shame before men on account of Christ was accompanied by the freedom from shame before their God.

**As it is written: "*Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.*" (Romans 9:33)**

## Despised the Shame

We learn in Hebrews that Jesus despised this man-given shame (Hebrews 12:2). This means He thought little of it. The joy of reconciling His bride dissolved this shame in the mind of our Savior the way a morning tide dissolves the footprints on the shore. Oh that we could so little esteem the opinions of men. Thank God our Savior has loftier concerns than we.

*Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, Thine only crown*

## Lower than a Goat

The shame mankind sought to bestow upon the Savior was one of disdained mockery.

**When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put *it* on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"<sup>30</sup> Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head.<sup>31</sup> And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His *own* clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified (Matthew 27:29-31).**

We rightly think of Christ as the anti-type of the old covenant sacrifices. The priest would slay the lamb and bring the blood before the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies on behalf of the people. Certainly this pointed to the sacrifice of Christ. But one thing should astound us; when the true Lamb of God came, He was esteemed lower than the lambs, bulls and goats that foreshadowed Him. There was no well-meaning human priesthood seeking to elevate the blood of Christ as man's hope for life.

## No Help for Christ

Instead of a well-meaning priesthood, the means by which our Savior saves us is the very hatred His resurrection conquers. There was no cooperation or encouragers. No one was rooting for Him. He had no priest for He was the Priest. No one can share in the glory of Christ's atoning work. When the King of kings came, a crown of thorns was put upon His head. The masses offered Him humiliation and His friends offered only betrayal, denial, and abandonment.

It wasn't as if God had a neutral party sacrifice the Savior; the sacrifice was not meant, by men, as a sacrifice at all, but rather an execution.

*How pale Thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn!*

### **The Man who Suffered**

The description of Christ found in Psalm 22 merely gives us the outward display of the inner and spiritual anguish.

**I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. <sup>15</sup> My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. <sup>16</sup> For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; <sup>17</sup> I can count all My bones. They look *and* stare at Me. <sup>18</sup> They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots (Psalm 22:14-18).**

Even though Christ is fully God and fully man, it was the man who suffered. It wasn't as if His deity was making the job easier. It was men who sinned against God, so the mediator had to be fully man. The second Adam was to undo the destruction of the first Adam.

*How does that visage languish, which once was bright as morn!*

### **Glorious to Languished**

"Visage" speaks of Christ's facial expression. His tongue clung to His jaw and they stared at Him. We ought not use our imaginations beyond the text in imagining the suffering Savior. We can only guess at the contrast viewed by those who beheld His glory and then beheld His languish or weakened state. But the human eye could in no way fully appreciate the true passion of the cross. For the physical pain of the nails and thorny crown was merely the tip of the iceberg.

*What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered, was all for sinners' gain;  
Mine, mine was the transgression, but Thine the deadly pain.*

### **Man's Only Hope**

Jesus purged the guilt of our sins (Hebrews 1:3). The unbearable weight of God's judgment is a judgment all men should rightly bear. The cross is man's only rescuer. It's the only one even offered, in any religion, save man's own futile efforts. Truly, apart from the cross we are all in a dismal state. For we either serve a God who doesn't demand righteousness or a God who demands

what no man can deliver. The former is a God who might as well be Satan; the latter is a God who can never be known.

### **Substitutionary Atonement**

The death and resurrection of Christ ransomed His people from the bondage of sin and death. In this portion of the hymn we sing of substitutionary atonement. Jesus died for me. This means the death I deserved, He took. This means that the death God's justice demands at the White Throne will be a death already suffered by Christ. The wages of sin is death. I have sinned and should, therefore, die. Jesus died in my place; I, therefore, have life.

### **The Power of His Death**

The power of this truth is lost if we improperly use the death of Christ as part of our evangelistic efforts. To tell someone that Jesus suffered death for them is proclaim that they have been rescued from the death they deserve. Depending upon the individual, this may, or may not be true. It is the Christian, and only the Christian, who can sing of Christ suffering the deadly pain for his eternal gain.

**For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.<sup>18</sup> For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted (Hebrews 2:16-18).**

Christ was made like His brethren, that is, He became a man that He might be our Priest and make propitiation, (appease the wrath of God).

*Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve Thy place;  
Look on me with Thy favor, vouchsafe to me Thy grace.*

### **Seeking Grace**

We read in Ezekiel **"The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4)**. It is very difficult for sinners, even saved sinners, to grasp the judgment they deserve. We deserve the cross and the wrath of God. To vouchsafe means to condescend to grant. The favor of God can only be found by His grace. Why would we then sing that God may grant that which is by grace? What good is the singing? Does

the singing bring the grace? Then our faith is in grace and singing. I hope we're good singers.

God has opened the eyes of His elect that they might see His grace, by His grace. And it is the continuing grace of Christ that preserves us in His grace.

**Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. <sup>24</sup> But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. <sup>25</sup> Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:23-25).**

We have a living Savior who prays for our access to the Father. And the prayers of this righteous advocate are always answered.

*What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest friend,  
For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?*

### **Inexpressible Words**

There are simply no words to express what has been done for us. I find human linguistic or poetic efforts to be feeble attempts. The Apostle Paul writes of how when he was caught up into Paradise he heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter (2 Corinthians 12:4). Clearly the words of thanks we read in the Scriptures are the best expressions of gratitude. Hence we should never stray too far from them.

*O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be,  
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee.*

### **Loving God**

We can be assured of God's undying love for us (Romans 8:39), but this hymn ends with a prayer that we will not cease loving God. How can we be sure of our undying love for Him? We can be assured of our undying love for Christ because it is a love wrought in our hearts by Him. He tells us that He will put His Spirit in us and cause us to walk in His statutes and keep His judgments (Ezekiel 36:27). He promises to give us one heart that we may fear Him forever – that we may never depart from Him (Jeremiah 32:39, 40). It is the power of the cross that justifies the bride as righteous before the Father and also richly adorns the bride that she should be holy and without blemish.

We praise our God for His love for us and we praise our God for our love for Him as well.

## Questions for Study

1. What does it mean that Jesus was put to shame? Does this mean He behaved shamefully (page 2)?
2. How did the Apostles respond to being put to shame (page 2)? Why do you suppose this was their response (pages 2, 3)?
3. Jesus despised the shame. Explain what this means (page 3)? Why is this valuable to us? How can we imitate this?
4. What one thing is missing when we examine the old covenant sacrifices and how they foreshadow Jesus (page 3)?
5. Discuss “no help for Christ” and why this is important (page 3).
6. Why did Jesus have to be fully man (page 4)?
7. Discuss the cross being man’s only hope (pages 4, 5).
8. What is substitutionary atonement (page 5)?
9. Why must we be careful when we tell people Jesus died for them (page 5)?
10. How can we be assured that our love for God will continue (page 6)?

*(complete text of hymn on reverse)*

## O Sacred Head

O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down,  
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, Thine only crown;  
How pale Thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn!  
How does that visage languish, which once was bright as morn!

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered, was all for sinners' gain;  
Mine, mine was the transgression, but Thine the deadly pain.  
Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve Thy place;  
Look on me with Thy favor, vouchsafe to me Thy grace.

Men mock and taunt and jeer Thee, Thou noble countenance,  
Though mighty worlds shall fear Thee and flee before Thy glance.  
How art thou pale with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn!  
How doth Thy visage languish that once was bright as morn!

Now from Thy cheeks has vanished their color once so fair;  
From Thy red lips is banished the splendor that was there.  
Grim death, with cruel rigor, hath robbed Thee of Thy life;  
Thus Thou hast lost Thy vigor, Thy strength in this sad strife.

My burden in Thy Passion, Lord, Thou hast borne for me,  
For it was my transgression which brought this woe on Thee.  
I cast me down before Thee, wrath were my rightful lot;  
Have mercy, I implore Thee; Redeemer, spurn me not!

What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest friend,  
For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?  
O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be,  
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee.

My shepherd, now receive me; my guardian, own me Thine.  
Great blessings Thou didst give me, O source of gifts divine.  
Thy lips have often fed me with words of truth and love;  
Thy Spirit oft hath led me to heavenly joys above.

Here I will stand beside Thee, from Thee I will not part;  
O Savior, do not chide me! When breaks Thy loving heart,  
When soul and body languish in death's cold, cruel grasp,  
Then, in Thy deepest anguish, Thee in mine arms I'll clasp.

The joy can never be spoken, above all joys beside,  
When in Thy body broken I thus with safety hide.  
O Lord of Life, desiring Thy glory now to see,  
Beside Thy cross expiring, I'd breathe my soul to Thee.

My Savior, be Thou near me when death is at my door;  
Then let Thy presence cheer me, forsake me nevermore!  
When soul and body languish, oh, leave me not alone,  
But take away mine anguish by virtue of Thine own!

Be Thou my consolation, my shield when I must die;  
Remind me of Thy passion when my last hour draws nigh.  
Mine eyes shall then behold Thee, upon Thy cross shall dwell,  
My heart by faith enfolds Thee. Who dieth thus dies well.