

Songs of the Cross:

“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”

John 19: 1-30

TRUTH: Since Jesus is the eternal Son of God who _____
lived a _____ life and _____ died on a _____,
what comes to _____ when you _____
“the wondrous cross” on which He died?

1. A “survey of the cross” should cause us to see our _____,
_____ selves with _____.

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.

How aware are you of your own sinful pride?

2. A “survey of the cross” should cause us to pursue a
_____ life of _____ to honor Jesus that is
marked by a _____.

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.

What have you sacrificed in order to honor Jesus?

3. A “survey of the cross” should cause us to _____ the
incredible _____ found in Jesus’ sacrifice of _____.

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?

**When was the last time you laughed and cried when
Thinking of how much God loves you?**

4. A “survey of the cross” should cause us to _____ to a
_____ of _____ devotion to _____!

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.

Can you (and would others) say Jesus has all that you are?

“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”

1. One of the greatest hymn writers of all time composed the beautiful hymn, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” Isaac Watts (1674-1748) was born in England, the first son of a family of the Dissenting tradition. Though his training in Greek, Latin and Hebrew would have allowed him the opportunity to become an Anglican priest, he chose to pastor a Dissenting congregation. Isaac Watts was the son of a schoolmaster, and was born in Southampton, July 17, 1674. He is said to have shown remarkable precocity in childhood, beginning the study of Latin, in his fourth year, and writing respectable verses at the age of seven. At the age of sixteen, he went to London to study in the Academy of the Rev. Thomas Rowe, an Independent minister. In 1698, he became assistant minister of the Independent Church, Berry St., London. In 1702, he became pastor. In 1712, he accepted an invitation to visit Sir Thomas Abney, at his residence of Abney Park, and at Sir Thomas’ pressing request, made it his home for the remainder of his life.
2. At the time of Watts’ birth, churches in England sang only metrical psalms. But by the time of his death, he had planted the seeds of a much more complex hymnody. His 600 hymns found in seven collections made the transition from a rigid, metrical psalmody to a freer, theologically-based hymnody.
3. Watts’ hymns include complex theology in a format that is ideal for congregational singing. Hymns should echo the theme of the sermon. He insisted that songs in the church should be fully evangelical and not just supplements to the Psalms; that hymns should be freely composed and not just hold to the letter of Scripture; and that hymns should give straightforward expression to the thoughts and feelings of the singers and not merely recall events of the distant past.
4. He also wrote texts to fit the most common psalm meters, allowing them to be sung by any congregation to a variety of tunes in such a way that each line contained a complete thought. This was important since the hymns, like the metrical psalms before them, were lined out by a precentor, or song leader. The leader would sing a phrase and then the congregation would echo back what had been sung. If a thought were spread out over two phrases, it would be broken up by this teaching technique. Watts smoothed out the process by including a complete thought in a single phrase as much as possible.
5. “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” is one of Watts’ finest poems and an excellent example of why he is considered a fulcrum in the transition to hymnody.
6. Several hymnologists have noted that this hymn, first published in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707), is an excellent example of many of his best techniques, such as his ability to write beginning lines which capture one’s attention, maintain a theme and build to a climax. **According to one historian, the hymn “successfully built a bridge from psalmody to hymnody and set the church free to create a living body of Christian praise in song.”**