

The Old Rugged Cross

Our lesson text for this study is found in **1 Peter 2:21-24** – “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: “Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed.”

In addition, I invite you to turn to page _____ in our hymn books. During this period of study, I want to spend some time looking at one of the most beloved hymns of the ages, considered to be a favorite of many brethren. It very well may be a favorite of some present. Believe it or not, but this song is disliked by many hymnologists as being too simplistic . . . too corny . . . too personal . . . among other comments. Yet, even though the so-called “experts” don’t like it, this song has touched the hearts of untold millions for a very long time. The song is The Old Rugged Cross.

George Bennard was born the son of a coal miner. No disrespect to sis. Loretta Lynn, but he was born a coal miner’s son. At age sixteen his father died and he had to work in order to support the family. Later in life he worked for the Salvation Army and eventually became a minister. It was while he was studying for a series of lessons about the cross that he began to write this song.

While studying about the cross, George came up with the first ten words of this song; “On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross.” But he couldn’t think of anything else to write. Just those words kept bouncing around in his mind. It was not until a couple of years later in 1913, some _____ years ago during a very trying time in his life that the rest of the words fell into place and he wrote the song that we have before us today.

Friends, I don’t know if we really think about the cross like we should. Oh, we pause and remember it every Sunday during our Lord’s Supper, but do we really dwell on the cross.? It’s the cross that brings the message of [John 3:16-17](#) to life: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” Obviously it was Christ who is the focal point here . . . but the cross is the symbol we remember. On the cross He suffered physical and spiritual pain. On the cross the blood flowed that washes over in removing our sins. It was because of our sins that we nailed our Savior to the cross.

ILLUSTRATION: In the famous painting of the crucifixion by Rembrandt, one’s attention is drawn first to the dying Savior. Then as we notice the crowd gathered around that scene at Calvary, we are impressed by the various attitudes and actions of the people involved in putting the Son of God to death. Finally our eyes drift to the edge of the picture and catch sight of a long figure almost hidden in the

shadows. He represents the artist himself, for Rembrandt realized what each of us need to realize, that his sins and ours helped nail Jesus to the cross. Friends, do you realize that you are part of the crowd that crucified our Savior. Think about that as we look at the verses of this song.

Verse 1

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, The emblem of suffering and shame. And I love that old cross where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain.

IT'S A RUGGED CROSS

Kind listeners . . . It's a rugged cross. Many are not comfortable in seeing churches put up beautiful crosses inside and outside their meeting places of worship. They feel it puts the wrong image in many people's mind. Jesus wasn't nailed to a nicely varnished, smooth piece of wood. It was jagged. Those huge splinter no doubt dug into the meat portion of what was left of His back.

EMBLEM OF SUFFERING AND SHAME

Crucifixion was a terrible way to die. It was so bad that no Roman, no matter how evil he was, could be crucified legally. Crucifixion was only done to non-Romans, and then only to the worst of offenders. It was used to make a point of Roman power. It sometimes took 2-3 days to die during which time people would walk by. . . stare . . . laugh at the victim . . . hurl insults at the suffering one . . . and looked with disgust the crucified one's dying body.

THE DEAREST AND BEST

It was Christ and only Christ who could take such a terrible symbol of death and shame and make it the most precious symbol known to many people. He died for a world of lost sinners, past, present, and those who would be in the future and whit whom you and I are ranked. Some die heroically in an effort to rescue others from peril. Some die for noble causes, freedom and liberty being among them. But our Lord even died for people what hated him . . . despised him . . . and laughed at His publicly displayed peril. He loved those who refused to love Him. He served a mankind that rejected Him. “He came to His own, and His own received Him not” ([John 1:11](#)). His was a King on a cross but rejected by those He came to save. His first recorded words while on the cross were: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” ([Luke23:34](#)). He died with a hear full of love for those around the cross.

Verse 2

O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world, has a wondrous attraction for me. For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above, to bear it to dark Calvary.

DESPISED BY THE WORLD

Christianity, when practiced sincerely, doesn't make us popular people in a lit of circles. Many will despise us as they do the cross. Did you know that some Jews blame Christianity for hatred of the Jews and the Holocaust? Our master said in the ninth and last of the

Beatitudes: “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” ([Matthew 5:11-12](#)).

Verse 3

In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine, A wondrous beauty I see;
For twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died, To pardon and sanctify me.

WONDROUS BEAUTY

I hope we are all like Mr. Bennard in the fact that when we see the cross, it is beautiful in the sense that it was chosen by God to be a part of our salvation from sin and death. And in the process, Jesus did more than just pardon me . . . He sanctified me, that is He set me apart. It is paramount to a King not only forgiving someone of a heinous crime against him, but then making him a part of the royal family. Can you see the beauty of the cross? Do you realize the pardon and forgiveness that pertains to the event that occurred there?

We need to realize that while there may be consequences to our sins, but the sin itself no longer exists in God's eyes when you come to Him for forgiveness in obeying the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you rejoice in being sanctified . . . IN being set apart from the world. We are in the world . . .but we are not OF the world. One day you will be judged and found not guilty.

Verse 4

To that old rugged cross I will ever be true, its shame and reproach gladly bear. Then He'll call me someday to my home far away, Where His glory forever I'll share.

I WILL EVER BE TRUE

This is where the rubber meets the road. God has done His part. The question becomes . . . “Will we do our part?” Peter wrote in **1 Peter 4:16** – “if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.” We need to be working every day to show God how much we love Him. We cannot EARN our salvation, but we need to work to THANK God for our salvation. Being true suggests faithfulness . . . and faithfulness is the key to spiritual growth.

Chorus

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross, Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross, And exchange it someday for a crown.

I'LL CHERISH THE OLD RUGGED CROSS

From the cross of Christ to a crown of life, the Bible shows us the way. Do you want the Christ of the cross? If so, you must also take the cross of the Christ. Jesus said in **Luke 9:23** – “Then He said to

them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." If we remain true to the cross, there will be a day when Christ takes that cross from us and gives us the crown of life. I cherish the statement of the apostle Paul in **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."

God's Plan for Man's Salvation