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F.B.F. Newsletter

April 2009

Volume 9, Issue 3

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The purpose of Faith Bible Fellowship is to glorify God by developing disciples of Jesus Christ from spiritual birth to spiritual maturity.

We define a developing disciple as one who:

- ♦ is worshipping God both privately and with other believers
- ♦ is growing in the knowledge of the Scriptures and applying it in daily life
- ♦ is sharing his or her life and resources with fellow believers
- ♦ and is sharing Christ with those who do not know him.

From Pastor Chris: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

So begins the famous hymn generally considered in ages past the greatest ever written in the English language, so considered because the British poet and cultural critic Matthew Arnold said so, and the nineteenth century English church agreed.

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross was already a century old when it was dubbed "the greatest," having been written by Isaac Watts in 1707.

Watts almost single-handedly changed the singing habits of the English-speaking church. As a teenager he was openly critical of the worship music of the day, which featured stanzas like:

*"Ye monsters of the bubbling deep,
Your Maker's praise spout out;
Up from the sands ye codlings peep,
And wag your tails about."*

Watts' ridicule of such verses did not rest well with his father, an ordained deacon. "That old hymnal was good enough for your grandfather, and your father, so I reckon it will have to be good enough for you!" Deacon Watts declared, adding "If you don't like our hymns, then let me hear one you have written better."

Well, he did write one better, in the consensus view of the church. Actually, more than one—about seven hundred fifty, in fact, including the one that declares,

*"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."*

The hymn is a contemplation of Galatians 6:14,

*"But far be it from me to boast
except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,
by which the world has been crucified to me,
and I to the world."*

Both the hymn and the Bible verse that gave it

birth offer a corrective to our entirely modern (as far as I can tell) penchant for seeing the cross of Christ as a divine statement of our infinite worth. "Another important aspect of self-esteem that must be considered," writes one modern commentator, "is that the cross allows every man to feel he is special because of the love the cross expressed." But Watts (after Paul) sees something else:

*"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."*

Grace does not mean not that Christ died for me because he made a calculation that I was "worth it," as if the purchase of my sin-ruined soul by the price of Christ's righteous blood were an even exchange. The price paid was infinitely greater than my essential worth, and I will forever be in God's debt because of it. As Watts wrote,

*"Were the whole realm
of nature mine,
That were an offering
far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life,
my all."*

It is the time of year when our attention is fixed on Christ's death and resurrection, as it should be. As we survey the wondrous cross, let us contemplate not how amazingly valuable we must be in God's sight, but how incomprehensibly great is the Father's love for us, and how we can live our lives as a thank-offering back to him.

Yours because His,

Pastor Chris