

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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A Biblical look at some popular hymns: "In Christ Alone"

Have you ever wondered why God made sisters? I know in my case they came in very useful. You see, whilst we boys played football or cricket in the garden, sometimes my brother, who was a bit wayward, would send the ball into a neighbour's garden. I was far too shy to go and ask for the ball back myself. Fortunately, we could send my sister, who was glad to feel useful and would make up for what was lacking in my personality. For whoever we are, we all have some characteristic or ability that is insufficient in our lives.

This morning, as we continue our look at some of the most popular hymns that we sing, we will use Stuart Townend's hymn "*In Christ alone*" as the basis for looking at the all sufficiency of Christ. For in Him alone is there no defect or lack. Perhaps later, after this broadcast, you would like to read again the words of the hymn for yourself and meditate on the greatness of His person. The great revival in congregational hymn singing arose out of a desire to teach sound doctrine to a largely illiterate general public. If they could learn to sing good doctrine, then, even though they could not read the Bible themselves, they would still know its great eternal truths. Though today literacy rates are much higher, it is still essential that what we sing accurately reflects what the Bible teaches. Poetic license should not be used as an excuse for wrong doctrine!

As the hymn is divided into four verses, we shall look at an all sufficient Person, then an all sufficient plan. We will then consider an all sufficient price before concluding with an all sufficient power.

Christ - an all sufficient Person

"In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm."

On my son's bedroom door are the words, "We can only please one person per day; today is not your day and tomorrow does not look good either." The words are a wry acknowledgement that we can't always please all members of the family all the time. However, when we consider the person of the Lord Jesus Christ we find that there are no such shortcomings in Him.

"Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious" 1 Peter 2:4-7. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height" Ephesians 3:17-18. There are so many aspects to His all sufficiency - His eternal greatness, His compassion, His obedience - we could lose ourselves in a meditation on each of these facets. But in the verses we have read we have just two. Firstly, God has made the Lord Jesus the perfect foundation for the church. It takes its shape and direction from Him alone. Only as we depend upon Him alone can we work and walk and worship together in unity. Man made traditions and rules divide but Christ forms the only true basis for a knowledge of God as Father and a pattern for our daily living. It is a remarkable thing that God has chosen to make known His multi faceted wisdom to the heavenly realms through the church - not in a day to come, but now - and it is all based upon Christ. Secondly, He forms the basis for all that will occupy us throughout eternity.

Imagine for a moment your perfect day! Mine would be a mixture of mountain walks in North Wales, good food, making a model and enjoying some good teaching. I can imagine I would enjoy this for a long time to come. But if every day for the next year was to be a combination of these things, I guess I would soon grow bored of it. Have you ever considered how long eternity will be? Well we can't really, but what we can say with certainty is that the all sufficiency of the person of Jesus will be enough to make each new day a complete delight. He, and He alone, is able to stop the immensity of eternity from becoming a monotony. No wonder Paul could lose himself as he considered the

width and length and depth and height. Paul did not exactly say what he was measuring, but I believe it was a consideration of all that God is and has done, and it is the love of Christ that makes it a reality to us.

An all sufficient plan.

Next, we shall consider an all sufficient plan.

*"In Christ alone - who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless Babe!
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live."*

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the word of life ... that which we have seen and heard we declare to you" 1 John 1:1 and 3. "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Have you ever considered the fact that it has always been God's intention that you and I would belong to Him? From the very beginning He has desired to communicate His eternal life. In time, this was perfectly expressed in the person of His Son as God's final word on the matter. How incredible it is that all the fullness of deity should be found in human form! A real person, like you or me, and yet fully divine! We can sense the wonder in John's thoughts as he says that we have seen with our eyes, and then to show that this was no transient glimpse, he says that we have looked upon. Then to show that He was no visual illusion, John says that their hands had handled. Think of that! Ordinary creature man had physically handled the God whose very nature is to reveal Himself. God manifest in the flesh - a truth far too great to confine to a few hectic days of the year at Christmas time. In a similar manner, Peter could say that they were "eye witnesses of His majesty" 2 Peter 1:16. So often in human things the memory fades and familiarity breeds contempt. And yet for these men who had actually seen the Lord, the reality of what they had seen became more real, more amazing, with the passage of time.

However, Jesus did not come just to leave us an example of how God the Father would have us live our lives each day. His sinless perfection was not the whole purpose of His life-but it was a necessary first step. Had Jesus not been absolutely perfect, then He could never have taken upon Himself my sins, and I would forever have been lost. God, who is absolutely righteous, and hates sin totally could never forgive sin without judging it. To do so would make Him complicit in our sin and that is a blasphemous thought. In the perfect plan of God, He has taken upon Himself, in the person of Jesus, the judgement that our sins deserved. There are those today, as there have always been, who would deny the necessity for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross. They do so to try and make the Gospel more palatable. But they are wrong. Mankind is utterly unable to do anything towards their own salvation. Our sinful nature is utterly unable to respond to God, and could not, even if it wanted to, which it does not, do anything to satisfy God. God had to satisfy Himself for us to be saved. So at the cross, Jesus took upon Himself my sins, for He had none of His own, and died the death I deserved, taking upon Himself God's judgement for my sin, so that God could righteously forgive me. Indeed, if we dare be so bold, God must forgive me, since the debt has been paid already. So it is, as we read earlier, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Everything I am, I am because of what He has done. There is no point being like Naaman, who when told how to be cleansed from his leprosy, by simply washing in the Jordan river seven times, went off in a huff. There was nothing in that to appeal to him. He wanted to do some great act to demonstrate his worthiness to be made well. His salvation from leprosy depended entirely upon God - there was nothing that he could do. In like manner, in the arrogance and pride of mankind, we want to do something to show that we are not so bad, that we deserve to be forgiven. But what God says is that we are so bad, and unable to do anything to remedy that situation. However, He has done all that is necessary and we need to just accept what He says as right. His plan was no reaction to events, dreamt up at the last minute to rescue a bad situation. Right in the middle of the book of Revelation, in chapter 13 verse 8, we find that Jesus was the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." This is one of those statements that makes us realise the inadequacy of our own minds. Such was the all sufficiency of God's plan in dealing with our sin, that it was as good as completed before we had even sinned!

An all sufficient price.

Let us now consider an all sufficient price.

*"And as He stands in victory,
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine -
Bought with the precious blood of Christ."*

"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver and gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" 1 Peter 1:18-19.

Oh! The hardness of man's heart! "He came unto His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). As far as this world was concerned they were happy to put Him on a cross and bury Him. And that was that. Just the other day I was shopping in town, when I saw a young lad with a T-shirt which had the words "If Jesus was to come back again" on the front. I thought that was interesting, until I saw the back, which read, "we would kill Him again!" And that would be that!

Except, when man has spoken, God always has the last word. Death could have no legitimate claim upon Jesus-for He was perfect. There is no doubt that He was completely dead when He was put in the tomb. Swoon theories and near death experiences do not explain the facts. Equally assuredly, there is no doubt that He is physically alive again. His bodily resurrection was no mass hallucination or story dreamt up by sorrowing disciples to help ease the pain. For such a great God changing between the states of dead and alive is no great difficulty - though for us it is an utter impossibility. But as the grave burst apart, like an old wineskin, into which new wine had been put, and Jesus came forth in the fullness of unendable life, God made the most dramatic statement possible to this world. The work of the Lord Jesus was utterly satisfactory to Him. Jesus had cried upon the cross "Tetelestai - it is finished - paid in full." But, the doubter might ask, had all my sins been accounted for? His resurrection is the absolute vindication of the completed work of the Lord Jesus upon the cross and the definitive guarantee of our forgiveness. It is also the template for our new life. For God now views the Christian as "in Christ". The new nature that we receive upon salvation is one that cannot sin. We are as right for heaven as we shall ever be in terms of our position, though in practice there is still much that interrupts our fellowship with Him. We have been saved for eternity because the price paid on the cross was sufficient to cleanse us from all sin. The all sufficient price that was paid upon the cross is valuable for all time. Perhaps you can look back to the cost of your first home, or that of your parents. In today's money it is almost laughable the prices that were paid. Time and inflation have eroded the value of money. What Peter emphasises is the timeless value of the blood of Jesus. It will always be immensely precious to the Father. It will always hold its redeeming value towards us. It is far more precious than those things that so hold our attention now - silver and gold - for it is of eternal value.

As those who have been redeemed to God, it is a wonderful thing to enjoy the simplicity of the relationship that we have been brought into. "I am His, and He is mine" very succinctly describes the eternal security that we have in Him. I belong to Him and as such am safe in His keeping. Nothing I do can ever change that sense of ownership. The forgiveness I received for my sins, upon my receiving Him as Saviour, was total and for all time. There is no more price to be paid. My eternal security is His concern and He is absolutely able to keep me until that day when each redeemed saint is with Him in Glory! But He is mine, and this speaks of my responsibility. I trusted Him, at a point in time, to forgive me for my sins. Now, and for the rest of my life, I need to keep on trusting Him to guide me and empower me so that I may live a life that is worthy of Him.

For many years, the armies of King Stephen and the Empress Matilda fought a civil war that tore 12th century England apart. One of the factors that eventually brought the conflict to an end was the realisation that Stephen's heir would make an awful king, whilst Matilda's would make a better one. So Stephen was to remain king until he died, whereupon Matilda's son, Henry II, would become king. If only Stephen's son had been a worthy prince the war might have ended so much sooner. His awful character had the very direst of consequences. Having been bought at such a price, and having come to know God as our Father, it would be a dreadful thing if we were to live in such a way that dishonoured Him.

An all sufficient power

So let us look, finally, at an all sufficient power.

*"No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny."*

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" Romans 8:1. "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" Romans chapter 8:38-39.

It has well been said that this chapter which begins with the tremendous declaration of no condemnation for the forgiven sinner, ends with a declaration of no separation for the beloved saint, because of what is found in between. Christianity is not meant to be an insurance ticket for after death. It is a whole of life relationship that ought to make a difference now. Sadly, all too often it does not! But in Christ there is the power for victorious Christian living.

Perhaps you can remember some incident in childhood when, because of some misdemeanour, you felt uncomfortable in the presence of one or other of your parents. The enjoyment of that relationship was broken, although the relationship never was. What was required was a frank admission of failure and then an acceptance of the forgiveness that was offered. So it is with God. We are His children, eternally secure because of the price paid in blood. We are expected to live in daily relationship with God as our Father, but this can only be based upon our obedience to Him, and a life that is free from wrongdoing. Too often, sadly, disobedience spoils the enjoyment of that relationship. There needs to be immediate confession of our failure for harmony to be restored to the relationship. But God so desires a relationship with us that He has sent His Spirit to indwell each believer, so that we have the strength to recognise our failings and to come to Him in confession. He is also the power that enables us to live in a way that is consistent with His nature. Sometimes we might feel that everything depends upon us and that can become a burden. In reality, we need simply to come to Him each day and ask for His strength to enable us to act in a way that honours Him and to find strength to do what pleases Him.

Throughout the New Testament we read of salvation in a threefold manner. Salvation past, when we came to Christ as our Saviour, acknowledging our sin. Salvation present, when we trust Him to keep us in our lives each day, aware of the failings of our old nature that is still very much at work in us. Salvation future, when He shall call us to be with Him, either through death, or at the Rapture, when all living saints, together with those who have died, shall receive the upward call to join the Lord Jesus in the air. Not one shall be left behind! And what a glory for Him! For the first time, every single believer in the Lord Jesus Christ will be together, surrounding Him, and bringing praise to Him. I can never know who belongs to Him truly and certainly not every single one throughout the whole of the Church's history. But He does, and not one will be missing for He has the power to keep each one. Sadly, sometimes a true believer may backslide even to the point when all outward indication of their true nature is hidden. But His power is able to keep them until that day. For each one of us today, though we may go through the most trying and difficult of circumstances, we need to learn that His power is able to sustain us. We are not left to soldier on, to manage on our own. In the very ordinary circumstances of life, as well as the extraordinary, He is able to keep us and give us the strength we need to live in a way that honours Him. It is His power that will allow nothing to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Love is a part of what God is, and it is His power that enables our failing human frames to be able to begin to understand His greatness.

I am reminded of Shammah. You can read about him in 2 Samuel 23. When all around ran away, he stood his ground in the middle of a field of lentils. Not the most promising defensive position you might say. But it was the ground that God had given him and so he stood, and God worked a great work through him that day. His enemies could not touch him - though doubtless he was exhausted by the end of the day and had many a bruise and cut.

In Christ alone - that is the ground we need to make our stand on. He is the all sufficient One. There is no better, no safer, no more wonderful place to be than depending upon Him for everything. Let us firmly resist the temptation to add anything to our faith, or for one minute to think that we can manage without His daily help.

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