



Am I a Soldier of the Cross?

3Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. (2 Tim 2:3-4)

The author of this great anthem/hymn was a diminutive (5 ft. tall) sickly man who gave evidence of precocious nature early in life. At the tender age of four, he was learning Latin; at age nine, Greek; French at age eleven; and Hebrew at age thirteen. What language were YOU learning at age four and nine?

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) is known as the Father of English Hymnody. A Non-Conformist, Isaac declined an opportunity for paid matriculation at Cambridge. He authored more than 750 hymns, many of which were metrical Psalms, and includes *Joy to the World* and *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*.

Due to recurrent illness, Watts felt inclined to resign as minister of his church in 1722. His physical stature and physical constitution in no way would betray a soldier's heart, but that is precisely the kind of persevering heart that Isaac Watts, by the grace of God, possessed. He yearned to evoke in the hearts of worshippers the inward joy that their outward worship should demonstrate. His hymns were a fine step forward in achieving that lofty purpose. This hymn under present study should provoke a question in our minds: Are we an enduring, soldierly servant of the Lord, or merely paid wimps of the realm?

Am I a Soldier of the Cross

Am I a soldier of the Cross,
a follower of the Lamb,
and shall I fear to own his cause,
or blush to speak his Name?

Following General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appaomattox courthouse on 9th April 1865, Herman Melville penned a poem encouraging recognition of the valor of the fallen soldiers of the Confederacy. Of the Color Bearers at Shiloh, he wrote:

The color-bearers facing death
White in the whirling sulphurous wreath,
Stand boldly out before the line
Right and left their glances go,
Proud of each other, glorying in their show;
Their battle-flags about them blow,

And fold them as in flame divine:
Such living robes are only seen
Round martyrs burning on the green—
And martyrs for the Wrong have been.

Color Bearers of both sides were traditionally young men of an age too tender to carry a rifle, so they were given the Colors of their unit which would be carried ahead of the leading elements of the Armies in battle. It took great courage, and perhaps a bit of youthful foolishness, to so expose oneself to the musketry and cannon fire of the enemy in open field. Valor is not always a measure of the righteousness of the combatant, but it certainly distinguishes a man who BELIEVES in something enough that he is willing to cast his life on the altar of his comrades, his nation, or his faith. Do we have the courage of a Color Bearer – we must for that is our primary obligation. We are Color Bearers of Christ, and there is no more righteous and glorious Color under which to engage the enemy of our souls than that of the Leading Ensign of Heaven – Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The first verse of the hymn above asks a very probing question. Are WE soldiers of the Cross? or, are we afflicted with the popular disease of timidity in proclaiming the Name of our Lord? A soldier must wear his uniform that identifies his loyalties. He marches under the Colors of his Lord. He is undaunted by the schemes of the Adversary. He is not fighting for medals and recognition, and he has invested his ALL in the undertaking. His enlistment is “for the duration.” He took an oath, much as do we at our Confirmation, to serve.

Must I be carried to the skies
on flowery beds of ease,
while others fought to win the prize,
and sailed through bloody seas?

There is a great war, begun in Eden, that has been waged from that time until today. During war, there are two distinct categories of soldiers – the valiant warrior, or that cowardly miscreant we call a ‘homesteader’ meaning he gets a stateside, or otherwise comfy, assignment and sits the war out in that assignment. Have we curled up in the velvet pews of our churches and not gone out on the field of battle? A soldier is often required to give up home and comforts and to travel with just his weapons of war. We travel much like pilgrims and strangers in the earth searching for a country (Kingdom of Heaven). (Heb 11:13-14)

Are there no foes for me to face?
Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace,
to help me on to God?

Those sin-beleaguered souls that populate our world are not the enemy – it is the disease organism and its carrier (Satan) that is the enemy. We are to carry the cure to the sin-afflicted soul and, prodigiously, gain new recruits for our army in the process. The world is not our home. The world is enemy to all that is good and honorable. The world is stranger to the loving strains of grace. The world has not provision to help you on your way to God. In fact, it is a constant discouragement of grace.

Sure I must fight, if I would reign;
increase my courage, Lord.

I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
supported by thy Word.

As Air Force Major General Frederick C. Blesse wrote in his manual for tactical fighter aviators in 1955 by the same title – “No Guts, no Glory.” Your spiritual courage is the measure of your faith. We lack the necessary courage in our native state, but the Lord imbues us with that courage necessary to prosecute our soldierly duties according to his Battle Plan. That Battle Plan is the Word of God! *“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”* (Mark 13:13) If the condition in which we began our lives is accounted as the full measure of importance, we shall all be destined for Hell. Happily, it is not the important thing. The important thing is not how we begin, but how we finish in the race of life.

Thy saints in all this glorious war
shall conquer, though they die;
they see the triumph from afar,
by faith they bring it nigh.

The Christian soldier is the only kind of soldier that forfeits his life on the damp, dank battlefield of life and finds himself ensconced at his awakening in the alabaster halls of Heaven. There is victory in death for the Christian soldier. They do, indeed, see that their battle has but one conclusion – victory for the King and total capitulation of the enemy.

When that illustrious day shall rise,
and all Thy armies shine
in robes of victory through skies,
the glory shall be thine.

Theodore O’Hara wrote a famous poem commemorating his fallen comrades during the Mexican-American War – *Bivouac of the Dead*. The poem later was used to memorialize fallen soldiers of the War Between the States. It is a beautiful and oft quoted poem, but it does not apply to the fallen Christian soldier. He LIVES though he were yet dead! War is a terrible mixture of wonders of fire and hail, screaming anguish, and unmitigated terror. But once an army wins its victory, the grimy, blood-stained uniforms and arms of battle are exchanged for the gleaming accoutrements of heraldry, and the crisp, clean uniforms of parade and pride. We shall see such a celebration of victory in the time of God’s choosing. We shall lay down, as the old song says, *“our sword and shield, down by the riverside. . . . ain’t gonna study war no more.”*