



**WHEREFORE** seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:1-2)

**FOR** the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thess 4:16-18)

This glorious hymn is appropriately sung at any season of the Church; but is particularly applicable to the Lenten Season. Written by twenty-two-year-old school teacher Ray Paler in 1830, it became a great spiritual resource to the hymnary of the church in 1832 when Lowell Mason combined the poem to his tune, OLIVET. I do not usually include a detailed description of the history of the writing of hymns, but I have made an exception in this case. A descriptive note is appended to this devotion describing Palmer's mood and the reason for composing the hymn.

### **My Faith looks up to Thee**

My faith looks up to thee,  
thou Lamb of Calvary,  
Savior divine!  
Now hear me while I pray,  
take all my guilt away,  
O let me from this day  
be wholly Thine!

May thy rich grace impart  
strength to my fainting heart,  
my zeal inspire!  
As thou hast died for me,  
O may my love to thee  
pure, warm, and changeless be,  
a living fire!

While life's dark maze I tread,  
and griefs around me spread,  
be thou my guide;  
bid darkness turn to day,  
wipe sorrow's tears away,  
nor let me ever stray  
from thee aside.

When ends life's transient dream,  
when death's cold, sullen stream  
shall o'er me roll;  
blest Savior, then in love,  
fear and distrust remove;  
O bear me safe above,  
a ransomed soul!

*1. My faith looks up to thee, thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine! Now hear me while I pray, take all my guilt away, O let me from this day be wholly Thine!* There are many manners of our looking up to our Lord Jesus Christ – we look up in awe of His sacrifice; we look up in guilt and humility; we look up in amazement, and we look up in thankfulness (and many other ways). The only sense in which we have looked down on Jesus Christ is when we found Him in a manger at Bethlehem. That was, too, in awe that we saw Him; but greater far is that awe in which we beheld Him on the cross – a Cross purchased at the price of our sins. We beheld Him as a people bereft of any goodness whatsoever. Our sins were our death warrant and could only be paid by death. Jesus was the only One qualified to take our place on the cross since He was sinless and was not under the same death warrant as we. The Lord is our Healer – both physically and spiritually, as demonstrated in the Wilderness by the uplifted brazen serpent on the pole. Mankind was bitten by the Serpent in the Garden at Eden. There were also fiery serpents which bit, and killed, the Children of Israel in the Wilderness. So God told Moses to lift that brazen serpent up on a pole in the midst of the camp and, when the people were bitten, to look to that serpent and that they might live. That was physical healing; but looking unto Christ upon the cross is the means by which we are healed from our deadly disease of sin.

*2. May thy rich grace impart strength to my fainting heart, my zeal inspire! As thou hast died for me, O may my love to thee pure, warm, and changeless be, a living fire!* I am amazed often at the varied spiritual response my soul receives in reading certain passages of the Bible. Sometimes they are full of beauty and I see no direct impact upon my present circumstance; however, at other times, there emerges a beautiful radiance from that same verse that thrills my soul for beauty and application to my life. The same is true of these classic old hymns. Most were written by men whose only reward was to please God and to inspire His people. Palmer sought no financial reward for this great hymn, but I am certain he received a heavenly reward. We all have fainting (dying) hearts until the Grace of God grants us a reprieve. We are then imbued with the power of God's Word and Spirit in our lives and become, as God is, a living fire. *For our God is a consuming fire.* (Heb 12:29)

*3. While life's dark maze I tread, and griefs around me spread, be thou my guide; bid darkness turn to day, wipe sorrow's tears away, nor let me ever stray from thee aside.* When a Christian has drawn near to God and known Him as a Friend, he begins to think like that "Friend who sticketh closer than a brother." (Prov 18:24) His daily discourse will contain thoughts of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. That is what makes the classical hymns different from modern childish songs being sung in

most modern churches. Regardless of the smothering darkness of the Valley of Death through which we travel, we have a Guide whose vision of the Way is unflinching. That Guide turns our darkness into day and reveals to us that death is a mere shadow with no real substance. But being short-sighted and near blind, we must not wander from the side of that Divine Guide and Light.

**4. When ends life's transient dream, when death's cold, sullen stream shall o'er me roll; blest Savior, then in love, fear and distrust remove; O bear me safe above, a ransomed soul!** I love Palmer's term for this journey of life we are on – "transient dream", for that is precisely what it is for the Elect of God. We are strangers and pilgrims in this mortal coil. Pilgrims do not carry materialistic burdens, but only those necessary for the travel. As Christians, we must do the same in our spiritual lives. We are strangers to the world, and it is not our friend, and we are pilgrims who do not settle for the cheap ornaments of a worldly treasure. We seek a city not built with hands – the New Jerusalem! *12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.* (Heb 11:12-16)

Attached below is the biographical testimonial of Ray Palmer and his purpose in writing this hymn:

*A lonely 22 year old school teacher who had experienced a discouraging year of illness and other difficulties lifted up his eyes one evening in desperation to God and was led to write the thoughtful words of this beloved hymn, which is one of our finest hymns on the subject of personal faith.*

*When just 13 years of age, Palmer was forced to drop out of school and take a job as a clerk in a dry-goods store in Boston. He began attending historic Park Street Congregational Church and there professed Christ as his Savior. Soon he felt the call of God to become a minister of the gospel. He resumed his education at Andover Academy and later was graduated from Yale University.*

*While at Yale, Ray Palmer took a part-time teaching position in a private girls' school in New York City. It was a difficult job that eventually affected his health and brought him to a state of depression.*

*One night while reading a German poem picturing a needy sinner kneeling before the cross, Ray Palmer was so moved that he translated the lines into English. Immediately his mind was filled with the thoughts of "My Faith Looks Up to Thee".*

*The Words for these stanzas were born out of my own soul with very little effort. I recall that I wrote the verses with tender emotion. There was not the slightest thought of writing for another eye, least of all writing a hymn for Christian worship. It is well remembered that while writing the last line, 'Oh, bear me safe above, a ransomed soul,' the thought of the whole work of redemption and salvation was involved in those words, suggesting the theme of eternal praises, and this brought me to a degree of emotion that caused abundant tears.*

*Palmer copied his verses into a small notebook and thought no more of them except to read them occasionally for his own devotions. Two years later, while walking down a busy street in Boston, he chanced to meet his friend, Dr. Lowell Mason, who was well-known in 19th century*

*musical circles. Mason was compiling a new hymnal and asked if by any chance Palmer might have some lines that would lend themselves to a new hymn.*

*I showed him the verses in my little notebook. We stepped into a store together, and a copy of the poem was made and given to him. Without much notice, Mason put it into his pocket. Several days later, however, when we met again in the street, he scarcely waited to greet me:*

*"Mr. Palmer, you may live many years and do many good things, but I think you will be best known to posterity as the author of 'My Faith Looks Up to Thee.'"*

*Dr. Lowell Mason's prediction about Palmer and his hymn certainly came true. Ray Palmer did accomplish much for God until his death at the age of 79. He became recognized as an outstanding evangelical minister and pastored 2 large Congregational churches in the east for 39 years.*

*Palmer was the author of several popular volumes of religious verse and devotional essays. He also wrote 37 other fine hymns, for which he would never accept payment.*

*Yet Dr. Palmer is best remembered today for his very first hymn text, a statement of personal faith in Christ written when he was just 22 years of age.*

*Thanks to 52 Hymn Stories Dramatized by Kenneth W. Osbeck*