



AT that time Jesus answered and said, *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*²⁶ *Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.*²⁷ *All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*²⁸ *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*³⁰ *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* (Matthew 11:25-30)

Perhaps equal interest to the lyrics of this ancient hymn is the story behind its origin. Atop an isolated prominence overlooking the Kidron Valley and the Dead Sea – about 10 miles from Jerusalem – is the monastery of Mar Saba. The monks of that monastery adhere to a very strict disciplinary regime, and most remain isolated in that desolate fortress-like mountain citadel throughout their lives. There were three men of that monastery who served there from around 725 AD to 794 AD – St. John of Damascus, St. Cosmos, and St. Stephen - the younger of the three who entered the monastery at the age of ten years and remained there until his death sixty years later (never having left that gloomy isolation). It is sad to realize that those lives may have been spent more profitably for the Lord had they gone forth into the world and preached the Gospel rather than secluding themselves in monasteries for the sake of growing personally more holy. But those were days of a different kind, a time when men and women were actually pleased to give their life-blood rather than deny faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The monastery today is home to twenty monks of the Orthodox Faith.

Imagine life in such desolate isolation! In evening hours, wolves and jackals would gather at the base of the cliff upon which Mar Saba rested and add their

sorrowful howls to the already dark and unbecoming halls of the monastery. It was in this joyless atmosphere that St. Stephen composed the lyrics to our hymn. The hymn has survived intact for more than 1200 years. The monastery still stands amid the gloom of stone and darkness.

The tune for the hymn is, *STEPHANOS*, by Sir William Henry Baker in 1868, and the English translation was rendered by the Anglican clergyman, John Mason Neale.

Art Thou Weary, Art Thou Languid

Art thou weary, art thou languid,
art thou sore distress'd?
"Come to me," says One, "and, coming,
be at rest."

Has he marks to lead me to him,
if he be my Guide?
"In his feet and hands are wound-prints,
and his side."

Is there diadem, as Monarch,
that his brow adorns?
"Yes, a crown, in very surety,
but of thorns."

If I still hold closely to him,
what has he at last?
"Sorrow vanquished, labor ended,
Jordan passed."

If I ask him to receive me,
will he say me nay?
"Not till earth and not till heaven
pass away."

Finding, foll'wing, keeping, struggling,
is he sure to bless?
"Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs
answer yes."

Art thou weary, art thou languid, art thou sore distress'd? "Come to me," says One, "and, coming, be at rest." After centuries of futility in keeping the Sabbath of the Lord Holy, to which had been added many mundane ordinances by the Jewish religious rulers, comes the Lord Jesus Christ – our Burden Bearer – to fulfill the true meaning of Sabbath Rest – not just for the seventh day, but every day of the week. Our rest is in Him regardless the physical efforts we expend. He takes our burdens upon Himself and gives us rest. All our works are His works. It is Christ who works in, and through, the Christian. Only those works done out of our own motives and will are those to which we may lay claim, and they are all empty of worth.

Has he marks to lead me to him, if he be my Guide? "In his feet and hands are wound-prints, and his side." As the prolific blind hymnist, Fanny Crosby, exclaims,

I shall know Him, I shall know Him
And redeemed by His side I shall stand,

I shall know Him, I shall know Him,
By the print of the nails in His hands.

I believe we shall know Him without need of any physical manifestation. The Holy Spirit will so powerfully abide upon the elect of God that all mystery of His being shall be revealed in a flash.

Is there diadem, as Monarch, that his brow adorns? "Yes, a crown, in very surety, but of thorns." The crowns of kings in ancient times were very heavy – some weighing as much as 200 lbs, believe it or not!. I suppose the weight of the crown was intended to symbolize the great weight of responsibility that the role of a king bore with it. But the crown of Christ was not made of gold, silver and precious gems. Its frame was of course vine, and its adornment was of exceedingly long thorns (approx. one and a half inches). Not only was this crown placed upon His brow, but it was pushed down on his head with much force so that the large thorns cut gashes into His scalp which bled exceedingly.

If I still hold closely to him, what has he at last? "Sorrow vanquished, labor ended, Jordan passed." The waters of Jordan loom ahead for each of us. If we will enter the promised land, as did the Children at the end of their Wilderness journey, we will need a hand in crossing – and that Hand is the hand of our Lord Jesus Christ. With faith in Him, we shall not cross Jordan alone, but hand-in-hand with Him on dry ground. Without Him by our side, we shall perish in the flood waters.

If I ask him to receive me, will he say me nay? "Not till earth and not till heaven pass away." How do we know for certain that we are secure in our salvation? Have we been blessed with the gift of faith and grace? Do we believe with humble hearts and love the Lord without mixture of compromise. If so, the Holy Ghost has moved in our heart and drawn us to the bosom of Christ, and those whom He has been given will never be forsaken by Him. *"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."* (John 6:37-40)

Finding, foll'wing, keeping, struggling, is he sure to bless? "Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs answer yes." We need no further explanation here than the Lord's own promise: *"5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. 6 So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. (Hebrews 13:5-6)*