



16 Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away. 17 And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: 18 Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst. (John 19:16-18)

A blessed old hymn that reminds us of the profound events of Passiontide. The words were composed by Cecil Francis Alexander in 1848 and were rendered in its most popular tune (Horsley) by William Horsley in 1848. There one instance of misleading wordage, which I will identify in the body of this devotion, in the hymn, but, overall, it commends itself to the glory of God and to the comfort of His people.

There is a Green Hill Far Away

There is a green hill far away,
Without a city wall,
Where the dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us all.

We may not know, we cannot tell,
What pains he had to bear,
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin.
He only could unlock the gate
Of heav'n and let us in.

Oh, dearly, dearly has he loved!
And we must love him too,
And trust in his redeeming blood,
And try his works to do.

Where is this Green Hill mentioned in the text of the hymn? The Hill was only green in the sense that it became the fertile soil of Calvary whose fruits have become the saved of God. Otherwise, that craggy old hill called Golgotha (place of the skull) was as

barren as a wilderness place. It located near a quiet and restful garden where it is likely the Lord was entombed. Golgotha was anything but a place of life – it was, instead, a place of cruel death. It will interest the reader to know that Golgotha (Mt. Calvary) was the same mountains upon which Abraham brought his only begotten son, Isaac, to be sacrificed. God promised *“God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.* (Gen 22:8) and it was on this Green Hill in faraway Jerusalem – outside the gates of the city – that God fulfills that great promise. The intended sacrifice of Isaac occurred, according to Bishop Ussher, almost two thousand years before the Crucifixion of Christ.

“There is a green hill far away, outside a city wall, where our dear Lord was crucified who died to save us all.” In the mind of the Jews, Jesus would not merit being put to death within the gates of the city. This was the measure of their hate, and fear, of Him. *“...that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.”* (Heb 13:12) It is sorrowful that churches of today seldom mention that once-and-for-all sacrifice made without the gate of the city – so Christ is again crucified by them without the gate of the churches.

“We may not know, we cannot tell, what pains he had to bear, but we believe it was for us he hung and suffered there.” We must KNOW that Jesus suffered and died for our sins with a greater certainty than the sure rising of the sun at morning. We believe in Christ as our lord and Savior, but we more than believe that He died for our sins. It is very true that we cannot know the pains that Christ suffered on that lonely Hill overlooking Jerusalem. The physical pain would exceed anything we can imagine; however, there was an even greater pain that our Lord felt in bearing the sins of all. He was of modest nature, yet He was stripped naked before the crowds of gawkers and antagonist. Every nail, every thorn, and every wound of the whip burned with the fires of sin which He had never committed. He did, for the first time, suffer alienation from His beloved Father – not because He lacked any measure of merit or righteousness, but because His Father could not bear to look upon sin – the sins of the world which Jesus never committed, but bore on the cross for us - or to observe the Darling of His Bosom being treated with such ruthlessness by the very people for whom He came to die.

“He died that we might be forgiven, he died to make us good, that we might go at last to heaven, saved by his precious blood.” It is very true that Christ died that we may have a means for the remission of our sins; however, His death in no way helps us to be good for we cannot be. *“ . . . there is none good but one, that is, God.”* (Mark 10:18) The truth is not that we should NOT be good, but that we cannot be. As Christian elect, we are saved by Grace unto good works, but those good works are not our own, but they belong to Christ working IN us. *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”* (Gal 2:20)

Whatever we do, as children of God, that is good, we must ascribe to the power of god working in our members; but whatever thing we do that is sinful, that we may ascribe to self. We are saved by grace and not good works – but having been saved, our lives should reflect the righteousness of Christ dwelling in our hearts.

“There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin, he only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.” This is an absolute truth because there was no other among the daughters of men that was even good at all. If someone was to die a vicarious death for our sins, it would necessarily be required that that person was not guilty of sin Himself; otherwise, He would be dying for His own sin which Christ had none. His atoning death on the cross, followed by His miraculous resurrection from the

Garden Tomb, did indeed unlock the Gate of Heaven for us. He blazed the trail to Heaven for He knew the way Himself – He IS the Way, the Truth and the Life!

“O dearly, dearly has he loved! And we must love him too, and trust in his redeeming blood, and try his works to do.” Does a five minute-old baby LOVE his mother? I think not. He has no clue what a mother is, but the mother loves the baby. She loved him first, and so he is able to love her when he knows her better. While we were yet strangers and unrepentant sinners, God loved us. We had done nothing of good to merit His love – it was unmerited love with which He loved us. His Holy Spirit, in due time, drew us as a hook draws a fish into His presence and His Kingdom. Why do we love our Lord Jesus Christ? *“We love him, because he first loved us.”* (1 John 4:19) The last phrase of this hymn is most telling. *“and try His works to do.”* Though we are imperfect vessels and unworthy of serving the Lord, His love and His Calling MAKES worthy and useful vessels. Because we have exchanged our old sinful free wills for His Divine Will, we desire those things that are pleasing to God. Though we fail and falter, we are yet *trying* to do His works and not those that once characterized us in our fallen state. A child will try, time and again, to imitate precisely what the parents do and so until, one day, that child is a carbon copy of the parent. Let us all become carbon copies of God. We will never be as perfect and clear as the original, but we shall bear His image.