

# How Deep the Father's Love for Us



This new hymn restores faith that hymns have a present and a future life as fresh expressions of the church's worship. The melody is singable but not trite; the lyrics are thoughtful without being boorish. And the message of the hymn leads us to a point of worshipful mystery not tidy resolution, "Why should I gain from his reward? I cannot answer. But this I know with all my heart: His wounds have paid my ransom."

Perhaps we ought to be careful not to reduce the meaning of the cross to only or simply a ransom view of atonement. If this is so we ought to be careful not only in our preaching, but also in our singing. Only in recent times and only in certain theological circles has a substitutionary view of atonement been claimed as the only proper way to understand the death of Christ. Certainly the Creeds don't claim a limited view of Christ's work. For the Creed, it is enough to say together, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried."

Theologians have wrestled with the meaning of the cross—

did the cross somehow appease an angry God?

was it an example of the kind of love we should show?

was it simply the empire's response to God's kingship on display?

It's an ongoing conversation. What we can say is reflected in the hymn. "How deep the Father's love for us; how vast beyond all measure; that He should give His only Son to make a wretch his treasure." We may not know exactly the theological depths concerning the cross, but we can say with assurance that we are God's treasure, wretches transformed by grace. And the cross stands central to that transformation.

While we might hope that a hymn could explore some alternative metaphors for understanding the meaning of the cross and salvation, let us be fair. We would not usually expect a single hymn, no more than a single sermon point, to always sum every nuance of Christian theology. As one sort of witness to the meaning of the cross for salvation, this is one fine hymn and worth singing regularly.

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