



Am I a Soldier of the Cross

This hymn is full of questions. Questions that beg contemplation; those that, rather than demanding a specific answer, make you muse. Questions that take you beyond the questions themselves to what's going on inside of you as you ask them. Questions that the very wrestling with them leads you either to confirmation or to a dis-ease that calls for a change.

Am I a Soldier of the Cross is just such a hymn. It asks questions. The questions don't call for answers – they demand a response. And the responses will either lead to an inner assurance of our faith and deeper commitment to our journey with the Lord, or we will find ourselves holding back from giving our all.

This hymn is personal. Isaac Watts posed these questions, it seems, first of all to himself. It is a deep, inner wrestling with the hard issues of faith. It calls for brutal self-honesty. These are not comfortable questions. Listen: “Must I be carried to the skies / On flowery beds of ease / While others fought to win the prize / And sailed the bloody seas?” It seems that Watts knew through his own life experiences that “this vile world” held both joy and sorrow, feast and famine, war and peace. While he was widely recognized and would leave behind a massive legacy of hymns and treatises, educational papers and spiritual writings, he also knew the pains and challenges of living with poor health all of his life, and he knew that many had it much harder than he.

In this hymn, Isaac Watts asks of himself, and us, some life defining questions. This hymn perhaps helped him to avow his fidelity through whatever life would bring. In it he asked for courage, and rested in the assurance of God's word.

Does not our own faith journey ask the same of us? Does not the world and all its enticements lure us into searching for a “bed of ease”? Does not life bring enough crises to shake our faith? Wouldn't we do well to pause regularly and read aloud the words so our ears and our hearts can hear them: “Am I a soldier of the cross?”

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