



Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone

Jesus walked through betrayal, abandonment, scorn, mistreatment, public humiliation, pain, suffering and death. This was the path that God set before him. Thomas Shepherd's hymn draws our congregations back to the streets of the Roman occupied Jerusalem. It forces us to a decision. "Must Jesus bear the cross alone?"

There are many people for whom there is little decision to be made. At many times and places the choice to identify with Jesus comes with violent persecution. For others the trials of life may seem unrelated to the walk of faith, but they are no less painful. "There's a cross for every one, and there's a cross for me," our hymn tells us.

In this life, suffering, sickness, and sorrow are not optional electives, but prerequisites. It's no good going in for the health and wealth gospel, which promises that the faithful can elude pain. If the Son of God walked through distress, then we shall too. The question now becomes will we be numbered among those who "now... taste unmingled love."

Life is hard and full of wrenching challenges. What will we do with our pain? In the third stanza, this hymn encourages us to bear "the consecrated cross... till death shall set me free." The trick is to see our suffering as sacred. This is the consecrating of the cross. We must learn to convert our pain, to allow it to take us on a sacred journey, or we likely will transfer that unconverted hurt to others. Fortunately, Jesus is our Master teacher who shows us through his life, his teachings and his Spirit how to convert pain. This is why we must go on this journey of bearing the cross with Jesus!

Finally, we will arrive "upon the crystal pavement down, at Jesus' pierced feet, joyful I'll cast my golden crown." Notice that eternally Jesus' body has the marks of bearing the cross, but they are now sacred wounds! We will be filled with joy and a golden crown will seem rather pointless. Having kept company with Jesus on the cross we will have long abandoned any illusions as to who is truly worthy of praise and power. In fact, we will have learned with him the great power that comes from our own weakness!

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