

# THE HYMNS WE SING: A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth, Part 1

Paul Gerhardt, 1648

Paul Gerhardt wrote the hymn *A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth* (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 142) in 1648 at age 41. Gerhardt grew up during the Thirty-Years War and lived a life marked with hardship and suffering, both physical and theological. His time as a Lutheran pastor in Germany was marked with controversy between the Lutherans and the Reformed. Gerhardt stood firm against the elector (governor) and compelled the Lutheran pastors not to compromise their faith.

Gerhardt is considered one of the best Lutheran hymn-writers. He wrote 133 hymns in all, twenty-one of which are included in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. (Some of his more popular hymns: 81, *O Jesus Christ, Thy Manger Is*, 172, *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*, 349, *Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me*, 554, *Now Rest Beneath Night's Shadow*) In Gerhardt's hymns can be detected the shift away from the objectivity that marked the early Lutheran hymns to the subjectivity of the more modern.

The hymn before us now, *A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth*, has been called "the masterpiece of all Passion hymns." (Pollack, *The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal*, 111) One of the great themes of the hymn is the *Agnus Dei*, the Lamb of God. In both the Old and New Testaments the Scriptures picture the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God. Isaiah 53:4-7 describes the Messiah as the suffering servant, "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth." St John the Baptist continues this theme of the Lamb of God in His preaching, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" [*St John* 1:29]

The first stanza holds forth Christ as the Lamb who bears all of our sin and punishment. All of His punishment, suffering, "anguish" and "death" is held before our eyes. All this, the hymn says, He suffers "willingly". This is an important theme in the hymn and the Scriptures: it is the Lord Jesus' desire to suffer and die in order to save us. He dies because He wants to, not because He must. We rejoice that the Son has such great love for us that He willingly goes forth unto death. [*See St John* 10:11,17,18]

The second and third stanzas recount a conversation between God the Father and God the Son. This reminds us of Luther's great hymn, *Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice* (ILH 387, especially stanzas 5-10), and, even more, of Psalm 2.

We first hear, in stanza two, of the Father's sending of the Son to save all mankind. Jesus says of His Father, "I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me." [*St John* 7:29, see also 4:34; 6:29,57; 7:16,28; 8:16,26,29,42; 9:4; 10:36; 12:44ff; 17:3,21,25] The hymn

holds forth the clear purpose of the Son's coming: to win our salvation.

The third stanza is the Son's response to the Father's sending, His saying "Yes and Amen" to the Father's will, as Jesus prays to the Father, "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do." [*St John* 17:4, see also 3:32; 5:36; 8:28] Gerhardt marvelously holds before our eyes the great love of the Holy Trinity of us sinners, that the Father desires our salvation and is willing to give His Son over to death [*St John* 3:16], and that the Son is willing and "content" to suffer all, even death, for us.

- 1. A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth,  
The guilt of all men bearing;  
And laden with the sins of earth,  
None else the burden sharing!  
Goes patient on, grow weak and faint,  
To slaughter led without complaint,  
That spotless life to offer;  
Bears shame and stripes, and wounds and  
death,  
Anguish and mockery, and saith,  
"Willing all this I suffer."**
- 2. This Lamb is Christ, the soul's great Friend,  
The Lamb of God, our Savior;  
Him God the Father chose to send  
To gain for us His favor.  
"Go forth, My Son," the Father saith,  
"And free men from the fear of death,  
From guilt and condemnation.  
The wrath and stripes are hard to bear,  
But by Thy Passion men shall share  
The fruit of Thy salvation."**
- 3. "Yea, Father, yea, most willingly  
I'll bear what Thou commandest;  
My will conforms to Thy decree,  
I do what Thou demandest."  
O wondrous Love, what hast Thou done!  
The Father offers up His Son!  
The Son, content, descendeth!  
O Love, how strong Thou art to save!  
Thou beddest Him within the grave  
Whose word the mountains rendeth.**

# THE HYMNS WE SING: A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth, Part 2

Paul Gerhardt, 1648

The “shift away from objectivity” that marks Paul Gerhardt's hymn can be seen as we consider the fourth stanza. In the first half of this Lenten hymn we hear about God the Father and God the Son, and there working and laboring to win man's salvation. The fourth and fifth stanzas show how that salvation effects us, the Lord's people.

How do we respond to the great gift of Jesus' suffering and death for us? We give thanks. Jesus' self-sacrifice calls forth thanksgiving. “My theme shall be Thy mercy's wondrous measure... Thy constant praise outpouring... Thy gracious love adoring.” As our faith takes hold of the wonderful promise of forgiveness, our hearts are full of gratitude toward the Lord, and out of the heart the mouth speaks. Thus our “stream of life” is a constant praise and thanks to God. “O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endures forever.” [Psalm 136]

The fifth stanza extols another fruit of Jesus' death for us: no fear of death and comfort in the midst of life's troubles. Hebrews tells us about how Jesus died to “destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” [Hebrews 2:14-15] Through Jesus' death and resurrection we are set free from the fear of death and are given a joyful conscience.

In a wonderful phrase, Gerhardt pictures for us Jesus' cross as an expansive tree with green foliage that offers us “cooling shade” from all the troubles of this world. We hide in the Lord's shadow [See Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 91:1].

Drawing heavenly from the imagery of the Revelation, in

the final stanza we are brought to the last day and the final judgment. Being set free from the fear of death, we are also set free from the fear of damnation. All the Lord's people

will stand before Him on the last day, not clothed in the robes of their own righteousness and good works, but rather covered with the royal robes of Christ's blood and crowned with His righteousness.

This is the picture of the saints in Revelation [7:13,14], “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?’ I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”

Dressed like this, “I need not hide me.” It is a sign of sin that we hide from God. After they had eaten from the fruit that God had forbidden Adam and Eve knew that they were naked, and were ashamed, and “the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God.” [Genesis 3:8] This is how it is with the sinner who is called to stand before God's judgment on their own strength, but it is not so with us. We

are clothed in Jesus' blood and perfect righteousness and so we need not run and hide, but instead we rejoice to stand at the face of Jesus.

“As Thine own bride, I shall be brought, to stand in joy beside Thee.” The Lord's bride is His church [Revelation 19:7ff] who waits, with patience, confidence and a sure hope for the Lord to call her home to Himself and to the blessed and unending marriage feast of life eternal.

**4. From morn till eve my theme shall be  
Thy mercy's wondrous measure;  
To sacrifice myself for Thee  
Shall be my aim and pleasure.  
My stream of life shall ever be  
A current flowing ceaselessly,  
Thy constant praise outpouring.  
I'll treasure in my memory,  
O Lord, all Thou hast done for me,  
Thy gracious love adoring.**

**5. Of death I am no more afraid,  
New life from Thee is flowing;  
Thy cross affords me cooling shade  
When noonday's sun is glowing.  
When by my grief I am opprest,  
On Thee my weary soul shall rest  
Serenely as on pillows.  
Thou art my Anchor when by woe  
My bark is driven to and fro  
On trouble's surging billows.**

**6. And when Thy glory I shall see  
And taste Thy kingdom's pleasure,  
Thy blood my royal robe shall be,  
My joy beyond all measure.  
When I appear before Thy throne,  
Thy righteousness shall be my crown,-  
With these I need not hide me.  
And there, in garments richly wrought  
As Thine own bride, I shall be brought  
To stand in joy beside Thee.**