

I don’t know if I should admit this or not: The hymn “Salvation Unto Us Has Come,” preaches a better sermon than I ever could—and in a lot less time. This hymn is a treasure of the Church because of the way it expresses the heart and soul of Christian faith. It is a prime example of how the hymns we sing uplift us and teach us.

*Salvation unto us has come/by God’s free grace and favor;  
Good works cannot avert our doom/They help and save us never.  
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone/Who did for all the world atone; He is our one redeemer.*

*Faith clings to Jesus’ cross alone/and rests in Him unceasing;  
And by its fruits true faith is known/with love and hope increasing.  
For faith alone can justify/Works serve our neighbor and supply/the proof that faith is living.*

There, in just a few of lines of poetry, you have the gospel itself and the proper relationship between faith and good works.

Let me tell you about the man who wrote these words. This hymn embodies the spirit of the Reformation Era, and there’s a good reason for that: the man who wrote them was a key participant in the Reformation movement, the movement that challenged the church of the Middle Ages with a return to Grace Alone; Faith Alone; and Scripture Alone. The man’s name was Paul Speratus, and his story, while dramatic by our standards, was fairly typical of those who led such reform.

Paul Speratus became a pastor in 1518. Early in his ministry, he started reading some books written by an upstart German monk named Martin Luther. Those books changed the course of his life. Speratus began vigorously emphasizing Reformation ideals in his preaching. He began to unfold for his listeners the wonders of God’s love for undeserving sinners. He began teaching that people are saved from eternal punishment by faith in Jesus Christ alone. Because of this, he was forced to leave three churches within a two-year span.

Two things happened next—he got married, and he went to the University of Vienna to earn a Doctor of Theology degree. But when he preached a sermon defending marriage of the clergy—a sermon that also featured that “faith alone” gospel theme—the university faculty branded him a heretic—a false teacher—and then things really got bad. He was imprisoned for a 12 week period, surviving on bread and water. He was threatened with death by fire during that same time. However, by God’s grace and the work of some good political rulers, Speratus was freed and ended up in Wittenberg, Germany. There he finally met Martin Luther, and became so involved in the Reformation movement that he helped Luther compile an early hymnal, doing

translation work, as well as writing his own hymns. “Salvation Unto Us Has Come” was a product of this time—a product of this man’s life—a product, more than anything, of the true gospel message taking root and blooming in the human heart. You can hear it all through the lyrics.

*“Since Christ has full atonement made/and brought to us salvation/  
each Christian therefore may be glad/and build on this foundation/  
your grace alone dear Lord I plead/your death is now my life indeed/for you have paid my  
ransom.”*

In these words you hear someone who has finally “seen the light.” And yet there was a significant personal cost Speratus paid for seeing the light of Christ. It meant rejection from the very Church that was supposed to carry this good news to the world. It meant imprisonment and the threat of death itself. As extreme as that may sound, it was not unusual for people like Paul Speratus to go through things like this as they were recovering the Bible’s true message of forgiveness in Christ. The personal cost they paid for seeing the light of Jesus was worth it to them—and they courageously confessed faith in Christ regardless of consequence.

I tell you the story of Paul Speratus in order to ask you this: what personal cost have you paid in order to follow Jesus? Or maybe I ought to step back and ask: Are you willing to pay a personal cost because of Christ? Would you be willing to go through what Paul Speratus went through for the sake of the true gospel of Jesus?

Only you know the answer to that question. What I know is the personal cost that Jesus paid to make you his own. Here’s the message that Speratus and others like him were willing to be imprisoned and threatened for—from Romans 3: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” Do you understand that phrase, “Propitiation by his blood”? A propitiation is a payment that sets things right. Jesus made that payment with his blood. The personal cost he paid to rescue you from destruction was huge. He left heaven to come to earth. He left glory to come into our pain. He left praise to endure mockery. He left perfection to become sin. He was nailed to a wooden cross. That’s what sin deserved. That’s what your sin deserved. Jesus took it. He pushed you out of the way of judgment, and it slammed into him. He is punished. You’re not. You are forgiven. Free. You have no debt to settle with God. You have no peace to make with God. He has made peace with you through this payment by Jesus’ blood, to be received—how? By faith. By believing Jesus’ blood payment washes your sins away; by believing his resurrection explodes the curse of death. Not by how hard you work; not by how good you think you are; “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in God’s sight.” It can only be received as a gift. You receive when you believe.

*Let me not doubt but truly see Your Word cannot be broken/  
Your call rings out, "Come Unto Me!" No falsehood have You spoken/  
Baptized into Your precious name/my faith cannot be put to shame/  
And I shall never perish!*

Do you know how dearly you are loved? If you have any doubts, look at the personal cost Jesus paid to gain you and keep you. Or as Paul Speratus put it, "Come to the cross, trust Christ, and live."