

In Christ alone

I lift my eyes to the hills -
where does my help come from?

My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

So states the Psalmist [Ps. 121:1 - 2].

A modern day Christian singer / songwriter would agree.

**In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
this cornerstone, this solid ground,
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My comforter, my all in all,
here in the love of Christ I stand.**

Over the next wee while I would like to invite you to examine the lyrics of this wonderful praise item, composed by Stuart Townend, and grasp some of the great theological truths contained in this song.

The Psalmist and Stuart Townend have grasped the glorious fact that in god times, in average times, and in bad times such as we are experiencing at the moment, there is one glorious and unchanging truth: there is hope, true hope, and that hope is found in Christ alone!

Lockdowns, confinement to barracks, social distancing, isolation, restrictions on movement, the shutting down of church premises, none of these affect or limit Jesus the Christ, '**Maker of heaven and earth**', God made flesh, King of kings, and Lord of lords.

In the midst of our current crisis it might seem hard to discern how God is in control, what the next wee while will bring, what society will be like when what passes for normality resumes.

BUT of one thing we can be sure God in Jesus the Christ never changes, he '**is the same yesterday and today and for ever**' [Heb. 13:8], and he keeps all his promises, including each of the following:

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." [Heb. 13:5b)]

". . . I am with you always, to the very end of the age." [Mtt. 28:20b)]

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." [Jn. 14:27]

In Christ alone 2

**In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
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firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
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My comforter, my all in all,
here in the love of Christ I stand.**

As I have already stated I would like to invite you to examine the lyrics of this wonderful praise item, composed by Stuart Townend, and grasp some of the great theological truths contained in this song. By the grace of God if we were to examine in any depth all of the theological truths in this praise item then we would still be examining them long after the Coronavirus will be a bad memory from a distant past!

In Christ alone

Let's be clear right from the start, true hope is found only in Jesus the Christ who is the only way by which anyone can come to God the Father. [see John 14:6]

In Christ alone my hope is found

What is this hope? It is the hope that we have in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. While once we were alienated from God, now, through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ:

we can receive eternal life through placing our faith in God in Jesus the Christ;

we shall stand justified before God on the day of judgment;

we shall receive from God that glorious inheritance that awaits us in glory - an inheritance that will never perish, spoil or fade. [see Colossians. 1:21 - 23; 1 Peter 1:3 - 5]

Of course our hope is not just a 'what'.

Who is our hope? Our hope is, of course, Jesus the Christ. This glorious hope of which we speak, is found only in Christ alone!

No Christ in your life - no hope!

Christ in your life - the hope of glory!

In Christ, who is the light of the world, we receive light and become the light of the world! [see Jn. 8:12;9:5; Mtt. 5:13 - 16]

In Christ who is the cornerstone of our life we receive strength, and find solid ground for our feet to see us through life's storms and challenges. [see Eph. 2: 19- 21; 1 Pet. 2:6]

Through this current crisis let us allow God to work through us as we stand in and on Christ alone, letting him shine light into our dark situation, giving hope to our needy world.

Remember:

God shall find a way where there seems to be no way.

In Christ alone 3

**In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
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What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My comforter, my all in all,
here in the love of Christ I stand.**

As we continue to examine the lyrics of this wonderful praise item, composed by Stuart Townend, and grasp some of the great theological truths contained in this song, we turn to the last half of verse one.

What heights of love, what depths of peace

See Ephesians 3:14 - 21. Paul speaks about the amazing width, length, height, and depth of God's love for us in Jesus the Christ. A love that moved Christ to give up all the glory, honour, splendour and majesty of heaven to humble himself to become one of us that he might die in our place so that we might live eternally with God, our sin having been paid for by the blood of Christ on the cross at Calvary. [see Corinthians 8:9; Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 9:22]

In Christ, and in him alone, through the depth of his love, we receive that peace of God that transcends all understanding. [see John 14:27; Romans 8:38 - 39]

when fears are stilled, and strivings cease!

Immediately we are drawn back to the amazing love of God in Jesus the Christ.

Why do we fear when God loves us?

As John wrote, '**perfect love drives out fear . . .**' [see 1 Jn. 4:18]

Jesus the Christ said, "**Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me.**" [see John 14:1]

As for striving . . .

The Teacher in Ecclesiastes laments:

'What does a man get for all the toil and anxious strivings with which he labours under the sun?' [Eccl. 2:22]

Paul writes that we are saved by grace, through faith not by works! [see Ephesians 2:8 - 9]

And Jesus the Christ warns against service without a living relationship with himself. [Matthew 7:21 - 23]

My comforter, my all in all

Jesus promised, and Jesus has sent in to the hearts of every Christian, the Holy Spirit, who, amongst other things is our comforter / **Counsellor**. [see John 14: 15 - 27; 16:5 - 16]

Christ shall never short change us, he is our **all in all!**

Thus surely we can echo Townend's declaration of faith:

'here in the love of Christ I stand.'

In Christ alone 4

**In Christ alone - who took on flesh,
fulness of God in helpless Babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
scorned by the ones he came to save
till on that cross as Jesus died,
the wrath of God was satisfied,
for every sin on Him was laid;
here in the death of Christ I live.**

As we move into verse two of this great praise item we continue to discover great theological truths.

In Christ alone - who took on flesh

Immediately we are reminded of the truth that all these blessings we are discovering are ours only in Christ alone! We are confronted also with the great mystery of Christmas, that the almighty God:

became fully human;

came as a vulnerable baby, relying on human help;

came in a form that permitted us to get close to him.

[see Isaiah 7:14; 9:6 - 7; Matthew 1:18 - 25]

Yet in this baby, this human child, this human man there is the **fulness of God**; Creator and Sustainer of all things; God the all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present One. [see Colossians 1:15 - 20]

This gift of love and righteousness

God who is love [see 1 John 4:16b)] has given us, in Christ, a '**gift of love**'. Indeed, he has '**poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.**'

[Romans 5:5]

Even more amazingly God gives to us, when we give our lives to him in Christ, and in Christ alone, the gift of righteousness.

And this is not just any righteousness: this is the righteousness of God!

Our own righteousness is '**like filthy rags**'.

[see 2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 64:6]

Yet sinful as we are the human race **scorned** and rejected God made flesh in Jesus the Christ, despite the fact that God made Christ, '**who had no sin to be sin for us**' thus taking our punishment for our sin, and allowing us to have eternal life with God in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even today millions still scorn him!

[cf. Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 4:14 - 16; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 9:22; Romans 6:23]

Next we shall look at the cost of salvation, as we consider Christ the propitiation for our sin.

In Christ alone 5

**In Christ alone - who took on flesh,
fulness of God in helpless Babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
scorned by the ones he came to save
till on that cross as Jesus died,
the wrath of God was satisfied,
for every sin on Him was laid;
here in the death of Christ I live.**

As promised, we move on to look at the cost of salvation, as we consider Christ the propitiation for our sin.

till on that cross as Jesus died

Firstly, let us remind ourselves that this was why Jesus the Christ came in the first place: he came to die.

He came to save his people from their sins [Matthew 1:21] and this meant taking the punishment for sin - namely death - and taking that punishment for the whole world.

At Easter we rejoice in the Resurrection but we must also remember that Jesus come not to rise but to die!

the wrath of God was satisfied

God is love. He is also gracious, merciful, compassionate and patient, BUT he is also righteous and just.

He requires that the penalty for sin must be paid.

Scripture tells us that **'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'**, and thus should pay the penalty.

Because God loves the human race, **'because of his forbearance he left the sins committed beforehand unpunished'** for a long, long time.

BUT payment was always due. Yet God did not want humanity to pay that price, nor did he want us to remain cut off from him because of our sin.

The solution? - come himself in human form and pay the penalty! And so, he came in Jesus the Christ, God made flesh, to redeem humanity by dying in our place. He made Christ, **'who had no sin to be sin for us'** thus taking our punishment for our sin, and allowing us to have eternal life with himself in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. He made Christ the propitiation for our sin.

Propitiation = the sacrifice that turns God's wrath away from us.

[sometimes referred to as an atoning sacrifice]

And so, if we come to him through Jesus the Christ we shall be justified in his sight: i.e., treated as if we had never sinned.

every sin on Him was laid

Now all our sin has been paid for and **'in the death of Christ'** we can live eternally with God!

[cf. Romans 3:21 - 26; 1 John 2:1 - 2]

In Christ alone 6

**There in the ground His body lay,
light of the world by darkness slain,
then, bursting forth in glorious day,
up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
for I am His and He is mine -
bought with the precious blood of Christ.**

Turning to verse three we find the glorious truth of Easter.

There in the ground His body lay

Following on from the last line of verse two, we underline the important truth that Jesus the Christ died! No swooning, no con job. Full and actual physical death!

light of the world by darkness slain

In Scripture '**light**' often denotes all that is good, all that is divine.

As John declares in the prologue to his gospel, '**The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.**' [Some versions 'overcome it'] Or, 'The licht glintit in the mirk, and the mirk couldnae grasp hud o' it.'

Darkness, of course, often represents all that is evil and opposed to God.

Jesus' self-declaration is "**I am the light of the world.**" [John 8:12]

So how come '**darkness**' killed '**the light of the world**'?

How come, if darkness cannot understand the light, or overcome the light, was it able to kill the light?

Firstly, if darkness had understood the light it would have welcomed the light not killed it. For centuries the Jews had been waiting for this light, the Messiah.

Secondly, as we have seen '**the light of the world**' came to die.

Darkness was allowed to kill the light because this was the will and purpose of God.

As we stated in Part 5 God came in Jesus the Christ, God made flesh, to redeem humanity by dying in our place. He made Christ, '**who had no sin to be sin for us**' thus taking our punishment for our sin, and allowing us to have eternal life with himself in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. [He made Christ the propitiation for our sin.]

then, bursting forth in glorious day, up from the grave He rose again!

Of course, darkness can neither understand nor overcome '**the light of the world.**'

To underline this glorious truth Jesus the Christ rose, or was raised from the dead: back to life never again to die. Scripture speaks about both Jesus rising from the dead and Jesus being raised back to life by the Father.

Either way it is the same God and the same glorious victory over death.

And as we shall see, this glorious victory has present and eternal significance for every human being!

In Christ alone 7

**There in the ground His body lay,
light of the world by darkness slain,
then, bursting forth in glorious day,
up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
for I am His and He is mine -
bought with the precious blood of Christ.**

We continue to look at the glorious truth and significance of all that God in Jesus the Christ achieved for us during his mission on earth.

And as He stands in victory

Jesus won the victory on the cross at Calvary: the victory over sin, evil and Satan. That victory was, is and always will be final and complete. BUT the Resurrection set the final seal on that victory. As we have been seeing throughout this Easter season the Resurrection was akin to a medal ceremony, or a lap of honour. Now the victory of Jesus the Christ over the combined efforts of a king, a Roman Governor, Gentiles and Jews is underlined for eternity. [cf. Acts 4:27 - 28] God's will for the salvation of the human race is fully accomplished. Only we can prevent ourselves receiving that salvation!

sin's curse has lost its grip on me

Sin, that cuts off people from God, has been defeated. No longer need anyone be held in its grip. No longer need anyone fear the penalty of sin: death.

Why? - because Jesus the Christ has paid that penalty once and for all;
because while **'the wages of sin is death, . . . the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.'** [Romans 6:23]

for I am His and he is mine

Here we find the deciding factor!

Having blessed us with free will, God will never force anyone into accepting his offer of eternal life through faith in Jesus the Christ. Each person has to accept for himself, or herself, all the benefits of the work of Jesus the Christ, by placing his, or her, faith in God in Jesus the Christ. It is when **I am His and he is mine** that I, that you, that anyone gains from the work of Jesus the Christ.

bought with the precious blood of Christ

Salvation in Christ alone is free to anyone who wants it, and comes to God the Father in and through Jesus the Christ.

BUT what a price was paid by God to set us free from the power of sin.

When describing a Christian's body as being the temple of the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote, **'You are not your own; you are bought at a price.'** [1 Corinthians 6:19b) - 20 a)]

That price was the precious blood of **'Jesus the mediator of a new covenant'**. [see Hebrews 12:24a)], **'without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness.'** [Hebrews 9:22b)]

May I refer you to two other great praise items.

Chris Bower's *I am not mine own* [CMP 256];

Graham Kendrick's *Paid on the nail*.

The latter includes these words:

Would you say you are worth what it cost Him?

You say 'no', but the price stays the same.

If it don't make you cry, laugh it off, pass Him by,

But just remember the day when you throw it away

That He paid what He thought you were worth.

As we prepare to examine the final verse of *In Christ alone*
we must get ready for more great truths!

In Christ alone 8

**No guilt in life, no fear in death,
this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man
can ever pluck me from His hand;
till He returns or calls me home,
here in the power of Christ I'll stand!**

We come to the final verse of Stuart Townend's great praise item, and we discover even more glorious truths: truths that we must apply in our lives so that we can be the witnesses God calls us to be.

No guilt in life

It is an unnecessary burden, indeed it is an admission of lack of trust in God, when we carry around with us guilt for sins of the past that have been confessed, repented of, and forgiveness graciously granted by God. In Jesus the Christ God has paid the penalty for all sins, and when we commit our lives to him in and through Christ alone we stand before him justified in Christ.

no fear in death

A Christian has no fear of death. Jesus the Christ has won total victory over death, and if you are in Christ that victory is also yours! It may be one thing to be concerned about how we might die but we should never fear death. Christ's brother Jude sums it up wonderfully when he states that God in Christ '**will present you before his glorious presence without fault and great joy**'. [v. 24]

If you are not a Christian you have much to fear about death. You might like to consider that the person in the New Testament who talks about hell more than anyone else is Jesus the Christ!!

this is the power of Christ in me

Why do Christians have such certainty? - because God in Jesus the Christ keeps all his promises. [cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18 - 22] Jesus the Christ promised that he would not leave us as orphans. Rather, he and the Father would send the Holy Spirit to dwell in Christians, empowering them to do his will, remember his teaching, and be their comforter and advocate. [cf. John 7:37 - 39; 14:15 - 22; 16:5 - 16; 20:21 - 22; Luke 11:13; 1 Corinthians 3:16 - 17] As the old chorus goes, 'He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world'. Jesus the Christ has also promised that no-one and nothing can take a Christian out of the hand of God, nor separate the Christian from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. [cf. John 10:27 - 30; Romans 8:38 - 39]

from life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny

Even from before you were conceived, '**let alone life's first cry**', God has had a purpose for you. You are no accident. You do not come off some giant production line. You are bespoke tailoring! You are unique. God wants to work through you!

Maybe God has been gradually showing you his purpose for your life. Maybe you have no idea what that purpose is. If not, ask him to show you his purpose!

One purpose we all share as Christians is to allow God to place us where he chooses and to work through us in that place. Even though we might not fully understand what he is doing. One overriding certainty we have as Christians is this: **'Jesus commands our destiny.'** In Christ God has us in the palm of his hand, and nothing and no-one can take us from him. 'We are safe in the arms of Jesus'. We are held safely and lovingly in the hands of the One who is love, the One who seeks our best!

[cf. John 10:27 - 30]

May God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit one God,
bless you and keep you, now and forever more.

In Christ alone 9

**No guilt in life, no fear in death,
this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man
can ever pluck me from His hand;
till He returns or calls me home,
here in the power of Christ I'll stand!**

The man with the sandwich board might be declaring 'The end is nigh,'
but today we come to the end of our look at this great praise item.

No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from His hand

We begin at the end of our last article!

In Christ God has us in the palm of his hand, and nothing and no-one can take us from him. We are held safely and lovingly in the hands of the One who is love, the One who seeks our best! [cf. John 10:27 - 30]

What a glorious truth. Whatever has happened, whatever is happening, whatever shall happen, nothing can take us out of God's care, nothing can separate us from his love, if we are in Christ. We can be separated from loved ones and friends by distance, by death, by lockdown and social distancing restrictions but nothing and no-one - either deliberately or unintentionally - can separate us from our God in Christ: our God in Christ who is love; our God in Christ who has experienced the full human life in fully human form; our God in Christ who is constantly interceding on our behalf!

till He returns or calls me home

One day God in Christ will either call us home to glory through physical death, or we shall see the glorious sight of his return in glory to claim the kingdom of this world for God the Father. [cf. 1 Corinthians 15:20 - 28] If we have gone to glory before that day then we shall be among the first to rise, and those Christians still alive on earth '**will be caught up together with [us] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.**' [cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:1 - 18; Revelation 11:15]

here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Christians have the nature and the power of Christ within them. As such we are on the victory side. Nothing and no-one can win the ultimate victory over us. Our God in Christ is our shelter, our refuge, our fortress. And in him we receive rest. [cf. Psalm 91:1 - 2] In Christ alone we find also our rock and our salvation. [cf. Psalm 62:1 - 2, 6] If we are in Christ, and in him alone, nothing and no-one can separate us from him and his love.

As Paul wrote:

'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword [or coronavirus]? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.' [cf. Romans 8:35, 37]

N.B.: God who loved us and still loves us, and always will love us does not give us his power to cope with things, to struggle through. He gives us his power to enable us to overcome!

By the grace of God we shall someday be able to join together to worship and praise his name, and give him thanks for his blessings through hard times and good times. On that day, and forever more, may we be privileged to sing this praise to him with a fuller and deeper appreciation of the great truths we have discovered afresh that are contained in
'In Christ alone'.

To God alone be all the glory!

Yours in Christ,
Douglas