



Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness
Text: Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760)
Tune: George J. Elvey (1816-1893)

Our righteousness is not our own. It comes only to us by the Blood of Jesus Christ, which makes His righteousness ours. When our last day comes, God the Father will look at us and see the perfect righteousness of His Son made ours. This is the wedding garment that allows us to stay in heaven and enjoy our seat at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end.

This hymn that teaches us to look to Jesus' righteousness and not our own was written by Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. He was



Nikolaus Ludwig von
Zinzendorf

born May 26, 1700 to one of the most influential families in Lower Austria. He spent his formative years at Halle, where Pietism was strong. For that reason alone it is remarkable that this hymn points us so strongly to Christ and His righteousness. Pietism was a movement that took off within Lutheranism that shunned the Divine Service and other forms of corporate worship because one could not guarantee that everyone present was a "genuine believer." For that reason, Pietists preferred

small group services and studies, where they focused on one's good works as proof of righteousness. After his education at Halle, he went to Wittenberg to study law.

He intended to have a career in law, but after suffering several personal disappointments and setbacks, he resolved to live a quiet life apart from others. However, in his new home in Berthelsdorf, in Saxony, he became acquainted with some of the area's pastors.

Though they did not intend to create a movement apart from the Lutheran churches, they ended up creating a Christian association that was meant to awaken the area's Lutherans from their reliance on Christ and to consider their own works.

At the same time, Zinzendorf allowed a group of exiles from Moravia and Bohemia (parts of the Czech Republic today), to take up residence on part of his vast land. This area became known for religious freedom, and because of that Zinzendorf was expelled from Saxony for ten years for allowing and espousing false doctrine. During his years of wandering, he formed a new religious group, the Moravians. Though similar to Lutherans in ways, it became a full embodiment of Pietism. Part of the Moravian idea was to maintain family, but to disassemble the nuclear family. Families were now formed on the basis of gender, age, marital status, etc. Several American settlements, such as those found in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and Salem, North Carolina, were founded on Zinzendorf's Moravian ideas.

During his life, Zinzendorf wrote almost 2,000 hymns. He wrote "Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness" in 1739 while he was returning home from the island of St. Thomas, where he was starting a Moravian mission. He used Paul Eber's "I Fall Asleep in Jesus' Wounds" (TLH 585) as a starting point for this hymn, which resulted in 33 stanzas! When John Wesley translated it into English, he kept 24 stanzas. Unfortunately, Wesley's 24 stanza translation has not been preserved.

This hymn points the sinner unquestionably to Jesus' Blood and merit as his source of forgiveness and righteousness. Because the Christian is clothed with these at his Baptism, he can stand bold on the last day because he is free from "sin and fear, from guilt and shame" (st. 2). "The holy, meek, unspotted Lamb," Jesus Christ, died to atone for us and His Blood is still our atonement for our sin in God's eyes (st. 3-4). In life and in death, Jesus' Blood is our only plea, the only thing to which we point for certainty of our salvation (st. 6). When we claim our "mansion in the skies," we claim it because of Jesus' "boundless mercy" which paid our ransom. "Jesus, be endless praise to Thee!" (st. 7)