



Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me

Text: Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676)

Tune: Unknown, *Geistliche Lieder*, Leipzig, 1539

In the face of all manner of trials it is easy to give into Satan's arrows and fall into despair and leave the Faith. However, the Christian is reminded that he is not alone. He has a loving God who carries him through all these trials. Nothing reminds one of this fact more than the Scriptures and faithful hymns. The hymns of Paul Gerhardt, a 17th century Lutheran Pastor, are those hymns. Gerhard's hymns are front-and-center with the suffering of life, but he always preaches the Gospel, that despite the trials of life, God's love is greater than the trials of life.

In the Lutheran church at Lübben, Germany, there hangs a life-size painting of Paul Gerhardt. Beneath it is the inscription *Theologus in cribro Satanae versatus*, "the theologian tested in Satan's sieve." That is the epitome of the life of Paul Gerhardt, one of Germany's greatest hymnwriters. At an early age, his father, Christian, died, while the Thirty Years' War raged throughout Germany. On January 2, 1628 Gerhardt entered theological studies at the University of Wittenberg, where he remained until April 1642. He then became a private tutor in Berlin, where his gift of poetry was nurtured. Johann Crüger took note of Gerhard's gift for hymnwriting and included most of his available hymns in his hymnal *Praxis Pietatis Melica*. In 1655 Gerhard married Anna Maria Berthold. 5 eir first daughter died in infancy, and the family suffered from extreme poverty. In 1657 he became assistant Pastor at St. Nicholas Church in Berlin. However, here he became caught in the extreme theological battles of the time. The elector of Berlin, Friedrich



Wilhelm the Great, thought Gerhardt sided with the Calvinists, when he was, in fact, a strong Lutheran. When he would not be a part of the false unity between the Lutherans and Calvinists, he was removed from office and not even allowed to preach in his own home. Gerhardt referred to this as his "Berlin Martyrdom." While this battle was raging, Gerhardt and his wife had five more children, but three of them did not live past their first few days. At the end of his "Berlin Martyrdom," another son died, and Anna Maria was seriously ill. He eventually returned to his congregation in the spring of 1668. However, at Easter of that same year, his wife died. Gerhard's only surviving family was a six year old son. In 1669 Gerhardt was Called to serve as Pastor in Lübben, where he remained until his death. In total Gerhardt wrote 133 hymns (21 of them are in *e Lutheran Hymnal*). However, while several other composers from his era see declining translation into English and inclusion into hymnals, Gerhardt's hymns are actually seeing a resurgence, and new Lutheran hymnals are translating and including more of his hymns, especially ones that were unknown.

"Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me" was one of Gerhardt's hymns included in Crüger's *Praxis Pietatis Melica* in 1653. Originally the hymn was 16 stanzas. The stanzas included in *e Lutheran Hymnal* are stanzas 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 15, and 16. Gerhardt's basis for this hymn was a prayer included in *Paradiesgärtlein*, a 17th century prayer book. It was first translated into English by John Wesley and included in his hymnal *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1739.

This hymn is a fitting prayer for those enduring times of struggle. The first stanza is a prayer that Jesus, because of His boundless love seen in His death and resurrection, would convert and comfort us by His Holy Spirit. After the Holy Spirit's work of conversion, the heart is His dwelling place. We then ask that the love of God would warm us and turn us from the devil's coldness, which he uses in his efforts to get us to leave the Faith. However, we will sin as long as we have flesh. Despite our sin, we ask that God comfort us with gracious words of forgiveness and "free me from every guilt and fear" because "no sin can harm if Thou art near." Finally we ask God to turn our suffering, weakness, and storms into peace, that His power reign in us, and that He continue to be our