

O SAFE TO THE ROCK THAT IS HIGHER THAN I (William Orcutt Cushing)

William Orcutt Cushing was born 31st December 1823 to Unitarian parents in Massachusetts. When he was in his late teens, training to become a Unitarian minister, he discovered the Gospel through his studies of the Bible. He left Unitarianism and entered the evangelical ministry serving in five churches, in the north-east of the United States. He married in 1854 but his wife suffered ill-health and died in 1870. Soon after her death he developed a neurological disease which resulted in him losing his voice. Since he could no longer preach he had to retire from the ministry after twenty-seven years' service.

He had been a great pastor, and very active in Sunday School work, - a 'people's pastor'. Why would the Lord allow him to lose his voice and not be able to preach? But he didn't become bitter, nor abandon his faith. Instead, he asked the Lord to use him in another way, "Lord, still give me something to do for Thee". The Lord answered his prayer and he wrote over three hundred hymns, the first of which was "When He cometh, when He cometh to make up His jewels". Many of his hymns were put to music by some of the greatest hymnwriters of the day, including Ira D. Sankey ... In fact, Sankey wrote the music to "O safe to the Rock that is higher than I". Both Sankey and Moody introduced many of William Cushing's hymns.

Despite his life being affected by sorrow and illness, he had a lovely reputation as a Christian gentleman. He died at the age of 79 on 19th October 1902 in Searsburg, New York, where he lived for his last thirteen years in the home of a Methodist minister ... he had become a Methodist.

"Hiding in Thee" first appeared in a collection of hymns, compiled in 1877. Cushing wrote the hymn six years after his wife died, based on words from Ps. 61:2 *From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.* ... He described how he came to write it, "It must be said of this hymn that it was the outgrowth of many tears, many heart-conflicts and soul-yearnings, of which the world can know nothing. The history of many battles is behind it."

Sadness and heartache have blighted the world since almost the beginning of time. It culminates with death which is the ultimate consequence of sin, **Rom. 5:12** *as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.* ... History is an inventory of how the Fall of man has been a scourge upon God's wonderful creation in that sin destroyed the

perfect relationship with Adam and Eve. However, God had already planned the answer to sin ... and in fact, before the sin, He had provided the Saviour. Before the world was created, God in His glory, - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit ... the Three in One, - formulated the plan of salvation in which each of the Three Persons of the Trinity were intricately involved. ...

The Father chose us from before the foundation of the world that we would be adopted to become His children through Jesus Christ. And everything the Father does for our salvation, He does through His Son. Through the Lord Jesus we are saved, we are redeemed, - purchased, - by His precious blood shed for us on the cross of Calvary. Through His work we have been reconciled to the Father. We are a new creation in Him. In Him we have been 'born again'. In Him we are being moulded and prepared for the day when we shall be presented along with Him before the Father, as His Bride. We are in a full and eternal relationship with the Father, through His Son.

And the Holy Spirit is living in each of us since our conversion and He is changing us from the inside out. He gave us the faith to believe in the Lord Jesus and to accept the grace of God to be saved. The Holy Spirit keeps and therefore, each born-again believer is a trophy of God's grace ... a testimony to the mercy of God in the salvation of undeserving sinners. ... Also, we are not saved to be alone, - God knew you from eternity, He loved you from eternity, He sent Jesus to die for you at Calvary, He watches over you every moment of the day and night ... and He has a plan which will culminate in you being with Him forever. ... He has promised each of the Redeemed, **Jn. 10:28 I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.** ... The God Who made the heavens and the earth is the God Who is keeping His people ... and the hymn writer opens the song of praise, "O safe to the Rock that is higher than I, My soul in its conflicts and sorrows would fly".

He knows all about me, even before there was anything of me. Marvellous are His works, and that is how He knows the way we take, for He has set the path in front of us ... And when we have come to the end of life's journey He will produce out of our meagre substance the most golden and precious possession. When we enter Glory, He will have made us all like unto His Son ... a perfect image of the Saviour.

This hymn shows us how He will have used the conflicts and sorrows to shape us into His likeness. He will have taught us there is no shame in hiding in Christ. The world hides in all *its* places, hoping to be safe, only to be disappointed. But

we have One into Whose presence we can run and be safe, “Thou blest Rock of Ages, I’m hiding in Thee”. We have a Saviour Who beckons His people, Mt. 11:28 *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

And even the way the psalmist impresses upon the Lord, lead me to the rock that *is higher than I*. ... He is acknowledging his own inabilities are unable to help him contend with life’s troubles. He would never have the strength to make it on his own! ... Another hymn says, “I must have the Saviour with me, For I dare not walk alone” ... and David knew it for he wrote, *Ps. 23:2 he leadeth me beside the still waters ...* ³*he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake ...* ⁴*through the valley of the shadow of death ...* and past his enemies, and finally into His house of the Lord where he will dwell forever. ... Despite the trials through which the Lord leads him, he knows he’s going home ... and at the end of the journey is waiting the God Who loves him.

Sometimes the Lord leads you along dangerous paths you would prefer not to be on, - there is “sorrow’s lone hour” and occasions when “temptation casts over *[you]* its power”. There are times when you feel you are sinking, and you don’t know what is going on ... you are afraid. When you look over the side of the path you are walking along, there is a frightening drop ... but He keeps you from falling. Sometimes you’re struggling up a steep climb, and you fear you won’t be able to make it to the top ... and then He reminds you in His Word you can do all things through Christ Who strengthens you (Phil. 4:13).

Some people say Christians shouldn’t have struggles to contend with ... but Christians are normal people. We live in a real world. William Cushing loved his wife and he loved preaching but the Lord took both from him. And yet, the Lord hadn’t finished with him for He opened another door for William Cushing.

The Lord never leaves you nowhere (double negative!). As His child, you are precious to Him, and He is watching over you. He will never allow you to become lost in an impossible situation for He will reach out His hand, He will lift you up and set your feet upon the eternal Rock which never moves. That Rock is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Foundation upon which the Temple of God, - His Church, - is built ... and not even the very gates of Hell can prevail against it. He has made His Church that it will never fall. ... And when you are standing upon the Rock, He has lifted you high above the waves.

Sometimes you might feel their splash cutting into your eyes. Sometimes you might feel the wild force of the winds ... but move further into the Shelter to

avail yourself more of Him as your refuge. The deeper your faith in Him, - the more you trust Him, - the safer you will feel.

Look at the words William Cushing uses throughout this hymn, illustrating what he was going through ... v.1, “conflicts”, “sorrows”, “sinful”, “weary” ... v.2, “sorrow’s lone hour”, “temptations”, “tempests”, “wide heaving sea” ... v.3, “conflict”, “pressed by the foe”, “fled”, “woe”, “trials” ... He knew about them all, and yet through each dreadful experience he repeatedly testified of God’s goodness, “Thou blest Rest of Ages, I’m hiding in Thee”. ... Isn’t it true you grow closer to the Lord in the difficult times! ... Often the conflicts *don’t* go away, and yet, the Lord keeps us through them. Another hymn William Cushing wrote, - and again the music was by Ira D. Sankey, -

Under His wings I am safely abiding,
 Though the night deepens and tempests are wild,
 Still I can trust Him; I know He will keep me,
 He has redeemed me, and I am His child.

*Under His wings, under His wings,
 Who from His love can sever?
 Under His wings my soul shall abide,
 Safely abide forever.*

Under His wings, what a refuge in sorrow!
 How the heart yearningly turns to His rest!
 Often when earth has no balm for my healing,
 There I find comfort, and there I am blessed.

Under His wings, oh, what precious enjoyment!
 There will I hide till life’s trials are o’er;
 Sheltered, protected, no evil can harm me,
 Resting in Jesus, I’m safe evermore.

The world runs in vain ‘from pillar to post’ looking for solace and comfort, but the psalmist teaches the believer to keep on trusting confidently in the Lord, Ps. 61:2 *lead me to the rock that is higher than I [the Rock of our salvation] ... for the day will surely come when I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever.* ... May the Lord encourage us through His Word today! Amen.