

WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS”

Joseph Scriven was born on 10th September 1819 in Seapatrick, Banbridge, Co. Down. He and his family belonged to the Plymouth Brethren. He graduated from Trinity College Dublin, with a bright career ahead of him. He fell in love, and was engaged to be married. However, on the day before their wedding, his fiancé was out riding on her horse, and while crossing a bridge over the River Bann, she fell off and was drowned ... Joseph was watching helplessly from the riverbank.

Understandably, his world was in tatters, and to overcome his sorrow he began to travel. In 1845, at the age of 25/26, he sailed for Canada but after two months he had to return due to ill-health. Two years later, he set sail again for Canada to take up a teaching post in a local school. He met and fell in love with Eliza Roche. With great excitement, they began to plan their wedding ... However, tragedy struck again when Eliza took pneumonia and died.

It's not surprising Scriven became the victim of severe depression and declining health. Being so far away in Canada added to his condition for he was missing his aging mum, who was going through her own serious illness. He had not seen her for over ten years, and he wasn't able to make the journey back home, and so, in 1855, he wrote her a poem, - intended just for her,

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear;
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer.
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful,
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
 Cumbered with a load of care?
 Precious Saviour, still our refuge—
 Take it to the Lord in prayer.
 Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
 Take it to the Lord in prayer!
 In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
 Thou wilt find a solace there.

Blessed Saviour, Thou hast promised
 Thou wilt all our burdens bear;
 May we ever, Lord, be bringing
 All to Thee in earnest prayer.
 Soon in glory bright, unclouded,
 There will be no need for prayer—
 Rapture, praise, and endless worship
 Will be our sweet portion there.

... It was simply a poem a son wrote to his mother. However, a friend was visiting him during his last illness, and asked, “Who wrote those beautiful words?” ... and Scriven replied, “The Lord and I did it between us”.

“What a Friend we have in Jesus” ... Solomon wrote, **Prov. 18:24** *there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother* ... and as Christians, we understand that Friend to be the Lord Jesus Christ Who explained to His disciples, **Jn. 15:15** *I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.*

In Exodus 33, - out in very inhospitable terrain ... out in the wilderness, - we read, **Ex. 33:9** *And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses. 10 And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. 11 And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. ... Also, James records for us, **James 2:23** *Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. ... When you have God as your Friend, He is your Friend for life.**

Another one of the most beautiful friendships in the Bible was between David and Jonathan, **1 Sam. 18:1** ... *the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. ... On the other hand, Psalm 41:9 speaks about*

a false friendship which belayed the relationship between Jesus and Judas Iscariot, **Ps. 41:9** *Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.*

Friends can encourage us, as well as disappoint us ... but the Friend the Christian has is the Friend Who will never leave them or forsake them ... because that Friend is Jesus.

There is another hymn which was written by a university professor, A.J. Showalter. He who heard that two of his music students had suffered bereavement, and he wrote a letter to them, finishing with the words, **Dt. 33:27** *The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.* ... He thought about those words, and wrote a chorus,

Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms;
Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.

He then sent the chorus to his friend, Rev. Elisha Hoffman, who had written over two thousand hymns (including “Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?” “Down at the cross where my Saviour died” “Where will you spend eternity? This question comes to you and me Tell me, what shall your answer be? Where will you spend eternity?” ... When Showalter received the three verses from Hoffman, he wrote the music to the well-known hymn ...

What a fellowship, what a joy divine,
Leaning on the everlasting arms;
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,
Leaning on the everlasting arms.

O how sweet to walk, In this pilgrim way,
Leaning on the everlasting arms;
O how bright the path grows from day to day,
Leaning on the everlasting arms.

What have I to dread, what have I to fear,
Leaning on the everlasting arms;
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,
Leaning on the everlasting arms.

Almost three thousand years ago, Solomon used similar words in his love song, **Songs 8:5** *Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? ...*

Those four beautiful words describe the closest of relationships which is the privilege of the child of God with the Saviour. ... In this verse, the Beloved and the Loved One have been in the wilderness *together*. Together, they had endured the searing heat of the desert, the dryness and the dust of the sand, the wind blowing in their faces ... but they persevered through the wilderness *together*. ... There was nothing could separate them, not even such harsh terrain ... The Beloved and His Loved One were *committed* to each other.

... And isn't that the basis for any lasting relationship ... *commitment*? Where there is no commitment, the relationship inevitably falls apart. When doubts arise, the relationship begins to disintegrate and crumble. Where there is no meaningful commitment, there is no real love ... nothing to hold up against the storms of life. ... But where there *is* commitment, the storms may howl around you, the waves can batter you, - illness comes, worries appear ... but still, your relationship will last for it is built upon a firm foundation of love and devotion to each other. ... And that, - even *moreso*, - depicts your relationship with Jesus Christ, for He is the best Friend you could ever have.

Despite anything about you, He still loves you. Before you were born, He loved you. Regardless of how you first considered Him, He applied the sovereign grace of God to your heart, and He died for you on the cross to wash away your sins, **Jn. 15:13** *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends* ... And that is what Jesus did ... You did not have to plead with Him to die for you, for He *chose* to take that path so you would be saved and cleansed from your sin ... That is how much He loves you, and He will never take away that love, **Jer. 31:3** *Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.* ... And everlasting love never expires, but continues forever and forever, and that is how another hymnwriter wrote,

The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell.
It goes beyond the highest star
And reaches to the lowest hell.

And when God set His love upon you, He *sealed* His love upon your heart by imparting the Holy Spirit into your life ... and no one and nothing can steal away from you what God has done. No illness, - no matter how terrible ... no difficult times in your life, - no matter how indescribable ... can rob you of what God has given you when He gave you the gift of His Son. ... Isaiah said to the Lord, **Is. 25:** *thou hast been a strength ... a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the*

heat ... Just as Solomon described when he drew the picture of the one who was leaning on her Beloved ... as they came out of the wilderness together. ...

Wouldn't you rather be with Christ in the wilderness than in the place of earthly plenty without Him?! ... Wouldn't you rather be with Christ in the vessel, than without Him on the shore? ... *What a Friend we have in Jesus!* ... *leaning upon her beloved.* ... And that is *how personal* it is ... and the longer you are with Him, the more you realise it ... Also consider *how peaceful* it is ...

The Beloved and the Loved One were coming up out of the wilderness, and there were no shouts of fear ... instead they have a song, *Songs 8:6 Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death ...⁷ Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.* ... And as the Beloved and the Loved One were coming up out of the wilderness, they know they will have to establish themselves together on new ground ... There would be the good times they would very happily share, but there would be the hard times too. However, what made all the difference was this, ... they were together, - the Beloved and the Loved One, and she was *leaning upon [depending upon] her beloved* ... as Isaiah describes, *Is. 30:15 in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength ... "Leaning on the everlasting arms".* *How personal, how peaceful,* ...

And *how practical* ... It is not as if she had to do something beyond her reach to capture His love, - she did not have climb a mountain or swim an ocean ... she simply had to respond to His love ... and she loved *Him* with all her heart, as He loved *her* with all His heart.

Often when we try to describe our faith to folk, they don't understand. The love of God is a concept which escapes so many ... and they don't understand what attracts to meet together in God's house ... they don't understand why we love to read the Bible and why we try to be obedient to what it says. ... They don't understand when we talk about Jesus being our Friend. ... They don't understand *how personal* He is, and *how peaceful* He can even make the most horrible situation to be. ... But then, you cannot understand it until and unless He becomes your Saviour and your Friend.

... It is all a mystery to those who don't know Him, but here is a young girl in the Song of Solomon, and she is showing *how practical* her love is, and others are noticing! It is a real deep love between these two, ... and the beauty of their relationship flows over so that others notice, and others see it.

Being a Christian is not just affirming and confessing doctrines and teachings from the Bible, - that is not to be underestimated in any way, for we are what we believe ... and we believe every word of Scripture for it is the perfect Word of God. ... But being a Christian is believing in the God of the Bible as your personal Friend Who accompanies you through every area and aspect of your life, - there is nothing you do He is not interested in. He is with you when you get up in the morning, He is with you when you lie down at night, and He is with you during the dark hours. He is with you when you have to make difficult decisions, and He is with you during those enjoyable times He blesses you with. ... That is what being a Christian is, - living with Jesus Christ. ... And being a Christian is not a 'temporary' relationship, - one you 'pick up' when you come to the meetings, and 'set down' again when you go back home ... There is nothing temporary about Jesus, for He is eternal, and that means He is *permanently* with you ... your Saviour, Lord and Master.

And that is how it is not all about doctrines (important as they are) and it's not all about being busy among God's people (important as that is), ... it is the **practicality** of being so much in love with Jesus that it penetrates every part of your being.

"What a Friend we have in Jesus" ... *leaning upon her beloved* ... **how personal** and **how peaceful** and **how practical**. ... and ... **how precious** ... The woman in the Song of Solomon had previously declared, **Songs 7:10** *I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me.* ¹¹ *Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages.* ¹² *Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth* ... It is new, it's fresh, it's vibrant, it's invigorating ... Her relationship with Him is *alive!* ... It is all about Him ... And there is nowhere else in the world she wants to be, but with her Beloved. She has no purpose anywhere else because she now belongs to Him. She is totally and completely His ... and He is totally and completely her's! ... And that is the measure of the believer's relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Immediately, I have to confess, sometimes other things try to interfere and disrupt this relationship. I might not mean it to, but sometimes other things creep in and threaten to take Christ's place ... That is what I have to guard against. ... When you say you love someone with all your heart, you will not allow anything to interfere with that love. You will not look at another person the way you look at your loved one. That relationship between you is more precious than any

words can describe ... and you will guard it with every bone in your body! ...
 And that is how it is when you love the Saviour, - it is so *precious* to you!

“What a Friend we have in Jesus” ... The love God has given us for Him is **personal**, it is **peaceful**, it is **practical**, it is **precious** ... and, lastly, it is **perfect**. It is not anything *we* have done which has made it perfect, but it is all what *God* has done, - He perfects that which He has placed within us for His own glory. ... When we stand before Him, we shall be there all because of what He has done for us, - His perfect work ... “Not the labour of *my* hands ... Nothing in *my* hand I bring” ... “For nothing good have I, Whereby Thy grace to claim” ... because, “Jesus paid it all, All to Him I owe”.

Be encouraged! When the devil comes along and tries to tell you where you are going wrong. ... Don't respond to him, nor give him any of your time. Instead, remember how God has given you His Son, and blessed you with His salvation, and how He has taken us out of the wilderness, and the Promised Land lies ahead. ...

What a Friend we have in Jesus! ...
 Blessed Saviour, Thou hast promised ...
 Soon in glory bright, unclouded,
 There will be no need for prayer—
 Rapture, praise, and endless worship
 Will be our sweet portion there.