

CFBC Hymns Class 45

**Mary Byrne (Translated Hymn in 1905)
Eleanor Henrietta Hull (Versified Hymn in 1912)**

Be Thou My Vision

*One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the Lord, And to meditate in His temple.*

Psalm 27:4

*If our focus is on ourselves, everything else is out of focus...
there is only One who is worthy of our complete focus... We cannot
focus on Christ if we insist on carrying the baggage of anything that
habitually turns our focus toward ourselves.*

Paul Chappell

WordWise Hymns on Be Thou My Vision

Dallan Forgaill was a blind Irish poet who lived over fourteen centuries ago. He was killed by invading pirates in AD 598. The earliest copy of this poem attributed to him is dated around a century after his death.

In 1905, Mary Elizabeth Byrne (b. July 2, 1880; d. Jan. 19, 1931) rendered an English translation in thirty-two lines of literal prose. She made no attempt to adjust the wording to create rhyming metrical verse that could be sung. Here is a sample of her work...

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart.
None other is aught but the King of the seven heavens.
Be Thou my meditation by day and night;
May it be Thou that I behold even in my sleep.

In 1912, Eleanor Henrietta Hull (b. Jan. 15, 1860; d. Jan. 13, 1935) produced a versified version of Byrne's work. That is the five stanza hymn that we sing...

These beautiful words constitute an early Celtic understanding of the person of Christ and His attributes.

In personifying various things that the Lord has given the believer, the poet tells us, in effect, that the Lord is those things. That to have them, we need to have Him, and to have Him is to have them. (for “my high Tower,” cf. Ps. 144:2).

Stanza 1) Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Stanza 3) Be Thou my Battle shield, Sword for the fight;
Be Thou my Dignity, Thou my Delight;
Thou my soul’s Shelter, Thou my high Tower:
Raise Thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.

Lest we think that this personifying of qualities is strange, it should be noted that the Bible does this frequently, especially in its Hebrew poetry. Here are a few examples.

- “The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation” (Exod. 15:2). This triplet of praise, after Israel’s deliverance at the Red Sea, is repeated twice more in the Word of God (cf. Ps. 118:14; Isa. 12:2).
- “Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield” (Ps. 33:20).
- “Sing aloud to God our strength” (Ps. 81:1).
- “In His [the Messiah’s] days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD [is] OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer. 23:6).
- “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Col. 3:4).
- “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Saviour and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope” (I Tim. 1:1).

The hymn writer glories in the fact that the Lord dwells within him and that he dwells in God (Stanza 2). Though the Scriptures clearly teach that the Spirit of God indwells each Christian, this pairing of ideas seems closer to Christ’s usage in John to refer to the believer’s close and unbroken fellowship with the Lord. Then we abide in Him and He abides in us (cf. Jn. 15:5).

Stanza 2) Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

The great hope and joy of the hymn writer is that one day he will be with the Lord in the heavenly kingdom, there to behold Him in all His glory (cf. Ps. 17:15)

Stanza 5) High King of heaven, my victory won,
May I reach heav'n's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

<https://wordwisehymns.com/2013/07/03/be-thou-my-vision>

The Story Behind Be Thou My Vision

The hymn, Be Thou My Vision is one of the most loved songs of all times. The medieval melody brings images of rolling hills and Scottish highlands...

Very few people know the story behind the song. In fact, the history of Be Thou My Vision is as ancient and mysterious as the haunting hymn itself. A quick look in a hymnal offers little help. Ambiguous entries like "Irish Melody" and "Anonymous" appear where the name of the composer and lyricist typically belong.

So what is the true story behind this legendary hymn? Where did it come from? And if it's so old, how did it survive to the 21st century?

The Melody

The story behind Be Thou My Vision begins with St. Patrick. When he was just sixteen years old, pirates kidnapped Patrick and sold him into slavery in Ireland. This caused him to enter adulthood knowing the Gaelic language and Irish customs. He also became a Christian during this time. Years later, he managed to escape and return home to his family in England. While most would've stayed home forever, Patrick chose to go back to Ireland and become a missionary!

What does all this have to do with Be Thou My Vision? On Easter Sunday in 433, the local Irish king issued a decree in observation of a pagan Druid festival that prohibited anyone from lighting a flame or candle. Patrick, refusing to honor anyone but Christ, stood against the king.

That morning, Patrick risked his life by climbing to the tallest hill in the area and lighting a huge fire. As the ancient Irish people woke up, they could all see Patrick's defiance of the king. He could not hide his light. Patrick wanted to show the world that God's light shines in darkness, and that only He deserves praise.



Years later, an unknown composer wrote a melody in honor of Patrick's heroism. Called, "Slane," the now-forgotten composer named it after the hill where Patrick shined his light: Slane Hill. People still recognize the tune today.

While the story behind the melody is legendary, the history behind the lyrics is much more obscure. Tradition tells us that an Irish poet from the 6th century named St. Dallán Forgaill wrote a Gaelic poem entitled *Rop tú mo Baile*, in honor of St. Patrick. Borrowing from another medieval poem, St. Patrick's Breastplate, Forgaill's lyrics referred to God as his "battle shield" and "high tower," phrases that still exist in the modern version today.

Sadly, the oldest existing copy of Forgaill's poem comes from the 14th century, which included no indication of its author. Because no other historical evidence connects Forgaill to the poem, it's impossible to verify the actual origin of the lyrics to Be Thou My Vision. As a result, most hymnals attribute the song to "Anonymous."

As the years passed, Slane, and *Rop tú mo Baile* fell into obscurity. Their authors, once known, faded away into the fogs of time.



The Song's Discovery

But in 1905, nearly fifteen hundred years after Saint Patrick lit a flame on Slane Hill, the forgotten hymn re-emerged from the mists of time. Mary Byrne, a 25-year-old university student, discovered the 14th century copy of *Rop tú mo Baile* and translated it into English for the very first time.

It that moment, the now-hallowed lyrics, “Be thou my vision... oh Lord of my heart” sprang from the forgotten pages of time and into the modern world. Later in 1912, an Irish woman named Eleanor Hull set the words to music. The melody she set it to was none other than "Slane," the medieval tune written in honor of St. Patrick. The hymn became famous overnight and appeared in its first hymnal in 1919. In 2019, the world celebrated the 100th anniversary of the modern version of Be Thou My Vision...

No one's story is done whose pages rest in the hands of the Father. No song is too old that it cannot be sung again in the choir of God's grace. Be Thou My Vision is a reminder that man's ways are not God's ways. The mist descends in the hills and rises to the sky. The mossy mountains crumble and groan. But the grace of God shines bright, as it did on Slane Hill in the days of Saint Patrick.

<https://www.bayviewbiblechurch.org/post/the-story-behind-be-thou-my-vision>

2 Corinthians 4:18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:6...God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

The Importance of Looking to Christ and His Glory (Excerpts)

Steve Fazekas on October 3, 2011 (Answers in Genesis)

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote about a certain kind of vision—a vision which could not be seen with physical eyes. Yet this vision is so real to the apostle that he referred to the unseen sights as things. “While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). His reality included the realm of the unseen.

What did Paul “see”? What was it that captivated his senses? What was it that enthralled and filled his soul with joy unspeakable? His vision was “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). He saw it with spiritual eyes. He looked to the glory which can’t be seen with the senses.

Lest we think that this is an experience for the super-spiritual only, we must catch the words, “but we all.” It isn’t just the Pauls of the world who get to take it all in. The invitation is for all believers. In fact, the vision of the glory of God has such a transforming power on us, that we who gaze are also changed. We are “transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart—
Naught be all else to me save that Thou art:
Thou my best thought, by day or by night—
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word—
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true Son—
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

Riches I heed not, nor man’s empty praise—
Thou mine inheritance, now and always;
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart—
High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art.

High King of heaven, my victory won,
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heav'n's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

Naught else matters with Christ as our King.

<https://answersingenesis.org/answers/biblical-authority-devotional/be-thou-my-vision/>

Verse 1:

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart

Psalm 26:3 For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes, and I have walked in Your truth.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.

Philippians 3:8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night,

Psalm 139:17-18 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You.

Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Psalm 3:5 I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustains me.

John 12:46 I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness.

Verse 2:

Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word;

1 Corinthians 1:30-31 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;

John 15:4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;

John 8:42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.

Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

2 Corinthians 6:16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be MY people.

Jesus said about the disciples in John 17:21-23 "that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."

Verse 3:

Be Thou my battle Shield, Sword for the fight;

2 Samuel 22:3 My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; My savior, You save me from violence.

Ephesians 6:13-17 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Be Thou my Dignity, Thou my Delight;

Matthew 10:29-31 Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

Psalms 37:4 Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart.

Thou my soul's Shelter, Thou my high Tow'r:

Psalms 61:4 Let me dwell in Your tent forever; Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings. Selah.

Psalms 18:10 The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous runs into it and is safe.

Raise Thou me heav'nward, O Pow'r of my pow'r.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Verse 4:

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,

Proverbs 11:28 He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like the green leaf.

Thou mine Inheritance, now and always:

Psalms 16:5 The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You support my lot.

Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,

Psalm 73:25-26 Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

High King of Heaven, my Treasure Thou art.

Psalm 47:2 For the Lord Most High is to be feared, a great King over all the earth.

Verse 5:

High King of Heaven, my victory won,

1 Corinthians 15:56-57 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heaven's Sun!

2 Peter 3:13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

The Lord said in Malachi 4:2 "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall."

Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said in Daniel 3:18 "But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

Psalm 16:8 I have set the Lord continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Psalm 47:7 For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful psalm.

<https://scriptureand.blogspot.com/2017/06/be-thou-my-vision.htm>

God is great, and worship is our response to His greatness! The church's primary purpose is to insure that God receives the glory He desires and deserves. That is why the saints gather together to corporately rehearse the greatness of God through worship. The focus of the church should be the worth-ship of God. Evangelism's main goal is first and foremost to recruit worshippers for God. When Christ is embraced as offered in the Gospel, the believer is brought into a personal worshipping relationship with God the Father.

Mike Chastain

Jesus Christ is not valued at all until He is valued above all.

Augustin

In Christ, as a great storehouse, lie all the riches of spiritual wisdom, the massive ingots of solid gold which when coined into creeds and doctrines are the wealth of the Church. All which we can know concerning God and man, concerning sin and righteousness and duty, concerning another life, is in Him Who is the home and deep mine where truth is stored... The central fact of the universe and the perfect encyclopedia of all moral and spiritual truth is in Christ, the Incarnate Word, the Lamb slain, the ascended King.

Alexander MacLaren

All divine names and titles are applied to Him. He is called God, the mighty God, the great God, God over all; Jehovah; Lord; the Lord of lords and the King of kings. All divine attributes are ascribed to Him. He is declared to be omnipresent, omniscient, almighty, and immutable, the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is set forth as the creator and upholder and ruler of the universe. All things were created by Him and for Him; and by Him all things consist. He is the object of worship to all intelligent creatures, even the highest; all the angels (i.e., all creatures between man and God) are commanded to prostrate themselves before Him. He is the object of all the religious sentiments; of reverence, love, faith, and devotion. To Him men and angels are responsible for their character and conduct. He required that men should honour Him as they honoured the Father; that they should exercise the same faith in Him that they do in God. He declares that He and the Father are one; that those who had seen Him had seen the Father also. He calls all men unto Him; promises to forgive their sins; to send them the Holy Spirit; to give them rest and peace; to raise them up at the last day; and to give them eternal life. God is not more, and cannot promise more, or do more than Christ is said to be, to promise, and to do. He has, therefore, been the Christian's God from the beginning, in all ages and in all places.

Charles Hodge

John Owen on Meditations on the Glory of Christ

When William Payne, the editor of Owen's book on the glory of Christ, visited him near the end of his life, Owen said to him, "*O, brother Payne, the long-wished for day is come at last, in which I shall see the glory in another manner than I have ever done or was capable of doing in this world.*" John Owen thus died meditating on the glory of Christ and with a deep and joyful conviction that death is not the termination but the consummation of his enjoyment of Christ. Owen describes the kind of restful life one would live if meditating on the gospel glories of Jesus Christ is one's chief delight...

Our beholding by faith things not seen, things spiritual and eternal, will alienate all our afflictions — make their burden light, and preserve our souls from fainting under them. Of these things the glory of Christ, whereof we treat, is the principal, and in due sense comprehensive of them all. For we behold the glory of God himself "in the face of Jesus Christ." He that can at all times retreat unto the contemplation of this glory, will be carried above the perplexing prevailing sense of any of these evils, of a confluence of them all. "Crux nil sentit in nervo, dum animus est in coelo." (One does not feel the pain of the cross when his mind is on heavenly things.)

Excerpts from John Owen's Meditations on the Glory of Christ (published posthumously)...

"A continual view of the glory of Christ will have the blessed effect of changing us more and more into the likeness of Christ."

"I would encourage you to prepare your minds continually for heavenly things by meditating seriously on the glory of the love of Christ. This cannot be done if the mind is always full of earthly thoughts. Do not be satisfied with general thoughts of the love of Christ but think of it in a more detailed way."

"On Christ's glory I would fix all my thoughts and desires, and the more I see of the glory of Christ, the more the painted beauties of this world will wither in my eyes and I will be more and more crucified to this world. It will become to me like something dead and putrid, impossible for me to enjoy."

"The pretended desires of many to behold the glory of Christ in heaven, who have no view of it by faith while they are here in this world, are nothing but self-deceiving imaginations...No man shall ever behold the glory of Christ by sight hereafter who does not in some measure behold it here by faith."

“By beholding the glory of Christ by faith we shall find rest to our souls. Our minds are apt to be filled with troubles, fears, cares, dangers, distresses, ungoverned passion and lusts. By these our thoughts are filled with chaos, darkness and confusion. But where the soul is fixed on the glory of Christ then the mind finds rest and peace for "to be spiritually minded is peace" (Rom. 8:6)

<https://reformed-theoblogy.blogspot.com/2011/05/meditating-on-glory-of-christ.html>

In Christ we have:

A love that can never be fathomed

A life that can never die

A righteousness that can never be tarnished

A peace that can never be understood

A rest that can never be disturbed

A joy that can never be diminished

A hope that can never be disappointed

A glory that can never be clouded

A light that can never be darkened

A purity that can never be defiled

A beauty that can never be marred

A wisdom that can never be baffled

Resources that can never be exhausted.