

Just as I am!

A remarkable lady, who spent most of her life as an invalid, died on the 22nd September 1871. Charlotte Elliott (1789-1871) touched the lives of thousands of people by her most famous hymn '*Just as I am*'. The hymn speaks of someone who had found complete satisfaction and contentment through Christ in circumstances that not only crippled her body but threatened also to break her spirit. It abounds in biblical references, the last line of every verse '*O Lamb of God, I come*' being based on John 1:29 '*behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*'.

In the first verse she expresses her certainty that Christ will welcome her, troubled though she is '*Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*'. (Matthew 11:28)

The hymn speaks of someone who had found complete satisfaction and contentment through Christ in circumstances that not only crippled her body but threatened also to break her spirit. Charlotte had wanted to know how to come to Jesus. From beginning to end the hymn tells us not only how but also why we are to come. It abounds in Biblical references, the last line of every verse '*O Lamb of God, I come*' being based on John 1:29 '*behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*'.

In the first verse she expresses her certainty that Christ will welcome her, troubled though she is '*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*'. (Matthew 11:28). Our trust is not in ourselves but wholly in Jesus and what he has done for us. With gratitude and penitence we acknowledge his saving work on the cross '*thy blood was shed for me*'. That is our only plea and it remains the centre of our faith. The Lord invites us to come to him '*thou bidd'st me come to thee*'. The initiative is his, not ours. He calls, and in faith we answer, '*O Lamb of God, I come*'.

*Just as I am, without one plea
But that thy blood was shed for
And that thou bid'st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

Verse two, speaks of Charlotte's state of mind when she wrote the hymn, her spiritual uncertainties, doubts and fears and here she uses a phrase from 2 Corinthians 7:5 to illustrate this: '*fighting without and fear within*'. But she looked away from herself and came to Jesus just as she was and found acceptance and assurance.

*Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

Verse three echoes her certainty, despite her infirmities, of her Lord's mercy as proclaimed in Luke 4:18' *...he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.*' When we come to Jesus just as we are, '*poor, wretched, blind*', we find in him everything we need: spiritual sight, spiritual wealth, and spiritual healing. He welcomes us to himself, pardons our failures, cleanses our hearts and relieves our anxieties.

*Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need, in thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

It would have been easy for Charlotte, as for others, before and after her, to shake her fist at heaven in angry protest and to squander her life in a continuous round of morbidity and complaint, but one thing helped her, and in verse four she remembers Christ's promise of acceptance as set out in John 6:37 'All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out'. She looks to Christ to heal and transform her and to give her the peace and contentment she so much lacked:

*Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve
Because thy promise I believe
O Lamb of God, I come.*

Then, something wonderful happens in Charlotte's soul. In verse five she speaks of the 'unknown love' of Christ – a love so wonderful that it had flooded her heart and swept away every barrier of bitterness, guilt and complaint. Line two being an echo from Ephesians 2:14: 'For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility'. Now she has an overriding desire to give herself completely, to respond to the overwhelming love of Christ.

*Just as I am, (thy love unknown
Has broken every barrier down),
Now to be thine, yea, thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

Eight years went by before she wrote the sixth verse, and by this time she did indeed 'have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge'

(Ephesians 3:18-19). She had found a lasting source of satisfaction and inner strength that redeemed all her suffering. In one simple powerful statement she sums up the meaning and purpose of human life as she had come to see it and declares:

*Just as I am, of that true love,
The breadth, length, depth and height to prove
Here for a season, then above -
O Lamb of God, I come.*

Her verse is characterised by tenderness of feeling, plaintive simplicity, deep devotion and perfect rhythm. For those in sickness and sorrow she has sung as few others have done.

