

What A Friend We Have in Jesus

Intro: There would be no reason for any of us to know this man. His name is Joseph Scriven and this is the only picture that remains of him. I think you'll find his story interesting.

The Story of Joseph Scriven

Joseph was born on Sept. 10, 1819, at Seapatrick in County Down, Ireland, near Dublin, into the wealthy family of Capt. John Scriven. However, his life was filled with tragedy and disappointment, as well as physical illness. His hopes to follow his father in a military career had to be abandoned because of ill health. So in 1835 he entered Trinity College where he graduated with a B.A. degree in 1842. During that time he met a young lady that he planned to marry. However, tragically the evening before their wedding his intended bride was accidentally drowned.

To help recover from the shock, Scriven emigrated, as were many Irishmen at the time, to Canada. In 1844 at the age of 25 Joseph took a job serving as a school teacher or tutor to the children of the Pengelley family who lived on Rice Lake near Bewdley, Ontario, Canada. One of those children later reported that while he was teaching them he lived with an old woman named Mrs Gibson, who lived nearby and who eked out a scanty living by keeping cows. Scriven is said to have often delivered the milk for her when she was crippled with rheumatism. There in Canada, he fell in love again and became engaged to a woman named Eliza Roche. And for a second time in his life, tragedy struck. A short time before they were to be married, Miss Roche contracted pneumonia and died.

Scriven moved to Port Hope, about ten miles north of Rice Lake. His two great losses could have caused him to abandon any thoughts of God; but perhaps because of his grief he became affiliated with the church of the Plymouth Brethren (a group affiliated with a restorationist movement in Ireland). He spent his life as servant to the underprivileged by helping those who were physically handicapped and financially destitute. Making his living as a carpenter, he received meager wages because he worked mostly for the widows and the sick, seldom for anyone able to pay, and what little he did make he often gave away to the needy. He lived in a small white shack and is said to have often taken in others who were down on their luck. Often he would share with people little verses that he had written to encourage them. The townspeople considered him eccentric, but he was respected and became known as "the Good Samaritan of Port Hope." Around 1855, he learned of his mother's serious illness back in Ireland, and since he could not be with her in far-off Dublin, he sent her a letter of comfort in which included a poem he had written to comfort her. That poem was later discovered by a friend named Jack Sackville at Scriven's bedside in a time of sickness. When his friend asked him who wrote it. Scriven replied, "The Lord and I did it between us". He had never intended that the poem be read by anyone else; but at his friend's urging, he gave

permission for it to be published anonymously in the local paper; and one could easily have imagined that it would never go beyond that. But the poem touched people hearts and amazingly it passed from person to person who appreciated its message (from Ontario to New York City to Erie, PA where it fell into the hands of musician and composer Charles Converse, who wrote a melody suitable to the poem. The poem now made into a song was among the last hymns entered by Ira Sankey in his Gospel Hymns #1 and from its appearance there it has been known by people throughout the world and has come into songbooks used by churches of Christ as well. But what did that verse say that Joseph Scriven wrote to his sick mother? This man who had experienced so much personal pain and had helped so many others sought to console his mother with these words.

“What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and grief 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.

Let take a few moment tonight to consider the message of this great song.

The Message of the Song

In life we need a friend

We have sins, sorrows, and sighs
We have sins and griefs to bear
We have trials, temptations, and trouble
We have weaknesses and heavy-burdens to carry
We may be despised and forsaken by others

We have a great friend in Jesus

A man of many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (Proverbs 18:24)

Jesus is such a friend to us. The song writer stresses several things about this “faithful” friend. Who He is and what He will do:

He is God (“everything to God in prayer”)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

It is a privilege to carry everything to Him.

“Jesus knows our every weakness.”

*And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (Hebrews 4:13)
for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. (Matthew 6:8)*

He is our "precious Savior"

Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)

Assures us that He cares for us

He is "still our refuge"

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1)

Promises us that he can protect us. "In his arms he'll take and shield thee".

When we pray to Him we can find "peace" and "solace".

He can bring peace to our souls

He can bring relief to our pain

He bears our griefs and sorrows

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

We must pray to receive these blessings

"We must never be discouraged" from praying!

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, (Luke 18:1)

We lose so much because we do not pray

Repeatedly he says, take it to the Lord in prayer!

Prayer will help us until the day it is no longer needed:

Scriven wrote one other verse that almost universally omitted:

Blessed Jesus, 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 shall be our sweet portion there."

Conclusion: Though it might not be considered great poetry by literary canons, this great hymn has comforted and encouraged millions and millions of people. That is because there is a reality behind the song—Jesus! Is He your friend?

He has proven what kind of Friend He can be. Have we proven what kind of friend we can be to Him?

You are My friends, if you do what I command you. (John 15:14)