

When God Doesn't Make Sense

You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand. (John 13:7)

Every disciple of Jesus comes to a place when he looks up to heaven and cries, "Lord, this just doesn't make sense! If you are all powerful and if you are good, then why would you allow these circumstances in my life?" Few people in the history of the church better illustrate the pathos of this question than William Cowper (1731-1800). One of the greatest English poets of the 18th century, Cowper lived a life that just didn't make sense. His story is a long, sad legacy of disappointments in romance, failures in career and bouts with depression. On numerous occasions he attempted to take his life. At one point his despair became so great he was admitted to an insane asylum where he stayed for 18 months. During this time, Cowper experienced an evangelical conversion and became a Christian. He was 33 years old.

Not long after his conversion, Cowper came under the influence of John Newton, the former slave trader and author of the hymn, *Amazing Grace*. For 13 years, Newton was Cowper's pastor, counselor and friend. Together the two men composed a hymnbook that included many hymns still sung today. Faith in Christ brought periods of relief and peace to Cowper's tormented soul and yet the bouts with depression never completely ceased. At times his despair and self-hatred were all-consuming. He became obsessed with the thought that he was not among the elect and was predestined for hell. And yet, Cowper never stopped believing in the mercy of God and the power of Christ's blood to save the most desperate of sinners. Thanks to Cowper we are able to sing:

*There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.*

*The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day;
And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away.*

*Lord, I believe Thou hast prepared, unworthy though I be,
For me a blood-bought free reward, a golden harp for me!*

But no hymn expresses the paradox of grace and sin better than Cowper's *God Moves In a Mysterious Way*. Perhaps no poet has ever better expressed the inexpressible, fathomed the unfathomable or explained the inexplainable.

*God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.*

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.*

*His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.*