



Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing

Text: Johann Heermann (1585-1647)

Tune: Johann Balthasar König (1691-1758)

A theme of Reformation-era piety is finding forgiveness for sin, peace, and protection in the wounds of Christ. Johann Heermann's hymn "Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing" fits this theme perfectly, as well as giving us strength in times of Satanic temptation, pointing us to Christ's temptation, but also His crucifixion and resurrection for our salvation.



Johann Heermann

Johann Heermann was born to a furrier in Silesia on October 11, 1585. He was the fifth—but only surviving—child of his parents. However, early in his childhood he fell gravely ill. His mother vowed that if God healed her only son, she would educate him for the Pastoral Office. She kept her vow, but had to beg to collect the money for his education. He quickly passed through the levels in the educational system, but his ailments followed him. By 1610 his sight was so poor that he had to have full-time care. In 1611 he was made

Deacon of Koben, a small town not far from his childhood home. He assumed the post on Ascension Day, May 12, 1611. By St. Martin's Day (November 11), he was promoted to the Pastorate there. However, by 1623 his health problems were mounting. By 1634 he could no longer preach because he no longer had a voice. He retired in October 1638, moving to Posen, where he died on this day, February 17, 1647.

Much of Heermann's life was spent in the distressing time of the Thirty Years' War. That in addition to his own poor health and personal struggles caused him to write his greatest hymns of

comfort, of which "Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing" is one of the greatest. In addition to his own struggles, his town was greatly afflicted as it was destroyed by fire in 1616 and most of its residents were killed by illnesses in 1623. In the midst of this, he published *House and Heart Music*, which contained some of his greatest hymns in the section entitled "Songs of Tears. In the time of the persecution and distress of pious Christians." As a hymnwriter, he is second only to Paul Gerhardt, who was one of Heermann's contemporaries. His hymns are marked by tenderness of feeling, firm faith and confidence in the face of trial, deep love of Christ, and humble submission to the will of God.

The hymn was eventually given a tune, DER AM KREUZ, by the German composer Johann Balthasar König, who is best known as the editor of the most comprehensive hymnal, compiled in the 18th century, the *Harmonischer Lieder-Schatz oder Allgemeines evangelisches Choral-buch* (Frankfurt, 1738). It contained an impressive 1,940 tunes. However, many of the Reformation-era tunes had been altered to eliminate the rhythmic variations, and all notes were given equal length, resulting in lackluster hymnody.

Heermann's hymn, "Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing" is a perfect hymn for times of temptation. The first stanza lays out the frailty of our human nature, that sin is always lurking, looking for an outlet. However, it is our prayer that we be shown its peril and kept from the sin before it even happens. However, he shows in stanza two that it is very difficult for us to keep from sin. There are many lusts and sharp temptations with "prove too strong for flesh and blood." However, when this sin assails us, we simply remember that "Christ for me was wounded," and in those wounds we find our full forgiveness. But Heermann reminds us that the temptation to sin doesn't just come from the devil and our sinful nature, but it also comes from the world, enticing us to the "broad and easy road with its mirth and luring vices." However, in those times when the world tries to lure us, we spend time in devotion on what Christ suffered for us, pushing the sin from us. In all our life, we find comfort that "Christ's all-atoning Passion has procured my soul's salvation." This gives us comfort to endure in this life because in Christ's Passion, "Death has lost his power." The Christ who died for us is not only our Protection, but is our "Light and Life and Resurrection."