



## Jesus, Priceless Treasure

Text: Johann Franck (1618-77) ✦ Tune: Johann Crüger (1598-1662)

The hymn, “Jesus, Priceless Treasure,” is likely one of the greatest Lutheran hymns. It is a coming together of two great Lutheran hymnists—the poet Johann Franck and the composer Johann Crüger. It is also a perfect wedding of text and tune, depicting the firm resolve of faith in the face of Satan, death, fear, and the world. The hymn first appeared in Crüger’s hymnal *Praxis Pietas Melica* in its 1656 edition.

The author of the text is Johann Franck, was a prolific hymnwriter, writing 110 hymns. A lawyer by vocation, Franck served most of his career in Guben. However, during his college studies at the University of Königsberg, Franck became friends with Simon Dach and Heinrich Held, both of whom wrote hymns (and each have two hymns in ✦ *e Lutheran Hymnal*.) Dach and Held saw Franck’s poetic gift and encouraged him to write hymns for use in the Church. Franck’s hymns largely deal with the idea of the union of the soul with its Savior. We have only four of his hymns in ✦ *e Lutheran Hymnal*: “Thou Light of Gentile Nations.” “Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness,” “Lord, to Thee I Make Confession,” and “Jesus, Priceless Treasure.” His hymns were all published in one collection in 1674 entitled *Geistliches Sion*.



The title page of *Praxis Pietas Melica*, 1656.

Crüger was equally as prolific with his composition of hymn tunes. His most noted music teacher was Giovanni Gabrieli, one of the most influential musicians of the day. Crüger served as Kantor of St. Nicholas Church in Berlin. Known as one of the most distinguished musicians of his time, Crüger composed 71 hymn tunes, of which 18 are in wide use throughout the Church. ✦ *e Lutheran Hymnal* has used 12 of his tunes, the most notable being NUN DANKET ALLE (hymns 10, 248, 344, 581, 629), NUN DANKET ALLE GOTT (hymns 36,

38, 93), HERZLIEBSTER JESU (hymns 143, 240, 258, 269), AUF, AUF, MEIN HERZ (hymn 192), SCHMÜCKE DICH (hymns 305, 659), and JESU, MEINE FREUDE (hymn 347). During his life, Crüger was involved in four hymnals, many seeing numerous editions: *Neues vollkömmliches Gesangbuch* (1640), *Praxis pietas melica* (1644), *Geistliches Kirchenmelodeyen* (1649), and *Psalmodyca sacra* (1658).



This hymn is a perfect example of the proper use of first-person discourse in religion, especially Church Music. Too often first-person music becomes about what I’m going to do for God. However, this hymn depicts the response of faith. None of our actions in this hymn serve God, but flow from faith. For example, at the start of stanza two we sing, “In Thine arms I rest me; foes who would molest me cannot reach me here.” We do not put ourselves in Jesus’ arms, but by faith we know that we rest in Jesus’ arms and He keeps us safely.

The only “troubling” spot in this hymn comes in stanza four when we sing “Jesus is my Pleasure, Jesus is my Choice!” However, this depicts the difficulty of translating hymns from German into English while maintaining the poetry and rhyme scheme, but also getting the meaning. In German that line reads, *Jesu, meine Lust*, with *Lust* better translated as joy or delight. However, a word needed to be picked that rhymed with “voice” later in the stanza.

One of Bach’s greatest Motets, BWV 227, is based on this hymn. Bach expertly crafted this hymn into an eleven movement choral work. Most notably, the third movement, based on stanza two, is musically challenging, with the singers vocally depicting the shaking earth, flashing lightning, and defiance of Satan. Ultimately the work centers in the text from Romans 8:9-11, “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.” This challenging fugue teaches the spirit of the hymn, that we are not in the flesh where evils can assail us, but the Holy Spirit dwells in us, removing us from the storms and sins of the flesh and bringing us to the peace which Christ alone gives.

This hymn is a timeless and faithful confession of Jesus’ protection and love for His redeemed sheep. Ultimately we confess that in death the trappings of the sinful world are left behind forever when we are taken to be with our “purest Pleasure, Jesus, priceless Treasure.”