



Lord Jesus Christ, My Life, My Light

Text: Martin Behm (1557-1622)

Tune: Unknown, Nürnberg, 1646

As we approach Holy Week, we hear more and more about the connection between Christ's death and resurrection and our forgiveness and promise of heaven. Good funeral hymnody relies solely on this Gospel message. However, good Lenten hymnody also incorporates the Christian's death and resurrection because of Christ's. Hence, the two topics cannot be separated. We cannot study the events of Holy Week without personal application. For a hymnwriter like Martin Behm, the sufferings of Christ make an impact on all areas of life.



Martin Behm

Martin Behm, was the son of Hans Behm, town overseer of Lauban, Silesia, where Martin was born. During Behm's teenage years his town experienced an extended famine. Wishing to protect him and also further his education, Dr. Paul Fabricius, a distant relative, sent for Behm and brought him to Vienna. Behm not only received education, but served as a tutor there. In 1576 he went to Straßbourg, where he was warmly welcomed by Johann Sturm, rector of the newly founded University there. However, at his mother's request, Behm returned to Lauban in May 1580 upon his father's death.

By Easter 1581, Behm was appointed assistant instructor at the town school, and on September 2 of that same year was ordained assistant Pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Lauban. The senior Pastor accepted a Call in Breslau in 1584, and the position remained open for two years. In June 1586, the town council appointed Behm to be the chief Pastor of the church. He served as Pastor there for 36 years and was highly regarded as a skilled preacher and caring

Pastor. During his pastorate, there were several periods of famine, pestilence, and war, but he stayed faithful through them all and was a caring Pastor for all those affected. He was also known as a prolific writer. However, Behm fell ill after preaching on the Tenth Sunday after Trinity 1621 (August 8) and lay ill for 24 weeks. Eventually he died on February 5, 1622.

Behm was regarded a prominent and prolific hymn writer, writing more than 480 hymns. His hymns often emphasize the suffering of Christ, something he did intentionally to impress them deeply on his own heart and those of others. His hymns were published in three volumes entitled *Centuria precatationum rhythmicarum*, released in Wittenberg in 1606, 1608, and 1615. Despite this large corpus of hymns, only three of his hymns are included in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, which are his only hymns which have been translated into English.

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Life, My Light" was written around 1610, and was published in a collection entitled *Christliche Gebet*, "Christian Prayer." This hymn, originally 15 stanzas, was entitled "Prayer for a blessed journey home, based upon Christ's sufferings." The first stanza was used in 1736 in a motet written by J.S. Bach, likely for the funeral procession of the *Stadtpfeifer*, the town piper. The assumption is made because the instrumentation is entirely for wind instruments, an arrangement only used for funeral processions.

This hymn captures the essence of the Christian's life. By faith we see the heavenly hope that awaits us, but "a weary way before me lies" (st. 2). Though our heart would sink under the weight of the journey, we pray for divine strength, courage, and peace. We focus on the sufferings of Christ for strength in our own (st. 4). We hide from Satan's rage in Christ's wounds (st. 5), knowing that only by His stripes are we healed and only by His Blood is heaven opened to us. When we need forgiveness, we look to the wounds of Christ as a reminder of what He endured to take our sin away (st. 7). Because we are Baptized into His death and resurrection, we make our heavenly journey in trust (st. 8). We await the resurrection of the dead for our "wasted flesh" to shine like the sun (st. 10), when we will sing with the angelic choirs, forever beholding the face of our Redeemer (st. 11).