

Real Life Stories
William Cowper - There Is a Fountain Filled With Blood

William Cowper was born at Great Berkhamstead in Hertfordshire in November 1731.

His mother died when he was only six years old and this tragedy left a life-long scar of grief. When he was ten he was sent to boarding school and there his suffering was added to by the cruelty of the older boys. However, he survived, and at eighteen began to study law. Although he passed all the bar examinations he never achieved much success in his profession. In nine years of law practice, so-called, Cowper never once felt worthy to serve people nor could he manage to attract business for himself. A clerkship in the House of Lords was arranged for him, but still he felt unfit for the task and was in such misery that he made several attempts to take his own life. The failure of these suicide attempts, compounded by two unhappy love affairs, increased his feelings of self contempt so that as he walked the streets he felt that all eyes were fixed upon him in scorn.

Because of the suicidal tendencies William Cowper was confined for a brief period in St. Albans Asylum and, remarkably, it was during this time in the mental hospital that his famous hymn was written.

A visiting relative sought to ease the sick man's depression by telling him of Jesus' power to save. Cowper burst into tears saying: "It is the first time that I have seen a ray of hope." When the friend had gone the poet opened his Bible at random and read from Romans 3:25; "*Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood*". This scripture account of the redemptive work of Christ touched Cowper's heart, enabling him to testify: "There shone upon me the full beams of the sufficiency of the atonement that Christ has made, my pardon in His blood, the fullness and completeness of my justification; and in a moment I believed and received the gospel."

So thrilled was he by his new-found hope that he described it in verse, basing it on the words of Zechariah 13:1; "*In that day there shall be a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness.*" It was William Cowper's hope that other troubled souls would be helped by his hymn.

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

Refrain:
*I do believe, I will believe,
That Jesus died for me:
That on the Cross He shed His blood
From sin to set me free.*

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

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved to sin no more.