

COLERIDGE-TAYLOR: THE ATONEMENT



**THREE CHOIRS
FESTIVAL 2025**
HEREFORD 26 JUL – 2 AUG

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor
The Atonement 90'

*The interval will be held after
movement III*

Rebecca Hardwick *soprano*
Aoife Miskelly *soprano*
Amy Holyland *mezzo-soprano*
Martha McLorinan *mezzo-soprano*
Mark Le Brocq *tenor*
David Stout *baritone*
Three Choirs Festival Chorus
Philharmonia Orchestra
Samuel Hudson conductor

**Supported by the Friends of the Hereford Three Choirs Festival
and the Music Reprieval Trust**

The Atonement

I. Prelude

II. Gethsemane

Chorus

In the soft moonlight glow
Of the Judaeen night,
Along the road their feet so oft have trod.
Jesus of Nazareth
And His disciples pass
Into the Garden of Gethsemane.
There, in the sombre shade
Kneeling apart, the Lord
In bitter anguish prays:

Baritone Solo (Christ)

"Father! the last dread hour
Of shame and death is near;
The Shadow of the Cross
Upon My Spirit falls;
Thy people hear My voice, yet heed Me not!
The snares of sin and death encompass Me!
The heavy sorrow of a weary world
Rests on My soul to-night.
Thy will, not Mine, be done!
But let Me feel Thee near –
Forsake Me not in My last agony!"

Chorus

Lo! through the gathering gloom
Of sad Gethsemane,
Upon swift wings a radiant angel comes!
Unto the Son of Man,
From the High Heaven sent down,
With confidence and hope to strengthen Him.
Then, passing hence, toward Heaven behold him soar,
Leaving the shadowy garden darker than before.
Then Jesus, rising, comes
Where the disciples lie,
Weary with tribulation,

Sleeping for very sorrow.

Baritone Solo (Christ)

"Could ye not watch one hour, oh My beloved?
Could ye not watch one hour?
Brave is the spirit, but the flesh, how weak!
Lest in temptation's path ye go astray,
Watch, ever watch and pray!"

Chorus

Listen! A murmur of voices.
A sound of numerous footsteps –
Behold! A glimmer of torches,
Brighter and brighter glowing!
Now from out of the shadows
An ominous crowd approaches,
And the torchlight fitfully flickers
On the helmets of Roman soldiers,
On faces destroyed by malice.

Baritone Solo (Christ)

"Whom seek ye? Whom seek ye?"

Chorus

"Jesus of Nazareth! Jesus of Nazareth!
The Galilean!
He that conspireth 'gainst mighty Caesar!
The Blasphemer!
Jesus of Nazareth!"

Baritone Solo (Christ)

"Lo! I am He.
Why come ye thus, all armed with swords and staves,
To capture me?
Daily in yonder Temple have I taught,
Daily I paced your city's crowded ways,
And yet ye took me not.
But now, as if against a thief ye come!
Behold! This is your hour,
Therefore I go with you."

Chorus

"Away with Him!
Bring Him to Caiaphas!
Lead Him to Pilate! To Judgement!
Away with Him!"

Baritone Solo (Christ)

"Oh, little flock, whom I have loved so well,
Why do ye tremble so?
Do those dim eyes not see

The Angel of the Lord that walks with Me?"

Chorus

But the disciples, they who walked with Him
In Galilee,
Stricken with terror, now desert their Lord
With one accord.
While Jesus, calm amid the raging storm,
Passes serenely on
Toward the city that rejected Him.



Coleridge-Taylor at the 1903 Three Choirs Festival for the rehearsal of the premiere performance of his piece The Atonement at the Shirehall, Hereford.

III. Prayer of the Holy Women and Apostles

Chorale

Father Omnipotent, to Thee
Out of the gathering gloom we cry;
Our faith is weak, our light is low,
The night of dark despair is nigh:
Deeper and Deeper the shadows fall,
Help us and guide us, Lord of All.

We in the darkness falter, Thou
In Heaven's clear light beholdest all;
The sounds of strife and sorrow here
Discordant on our senses fall;
But well we know they blend for Thee
In calm and perfect harmony,

Lighten our darkness, King of kings,
Strengthen our faith and calm our fears;
Keep Thou the stumbling teeth that treat
The pathway of the Vale of Tears;
Till at the last our souls are blest
Father, in Thine Eternal Rest.

IV. Pontius Pilate

Chorus

The night is past;
Bright glows the Eastern sky;
And as the sun
Rises above the dark Judaeian hills,
The multitude
Lead Jesus forth to the Praetorium,
To Pontius Pilate.

Tenor Solo (Pilate)

Upon what accusation,
Oh men of Judaea,
Bring ye this Man to me?

Chorus

He is a traitor,
A traitor to Caesar!
He maketh the sedition
Throughout all Jewry
Perverting the nation!

Tenor Solo (Pilate)

Behold, I, a Roman,
And faithful to Caesar,
Find no such fault in Him!

Chorus

He is a blasphemer! He scorneth our priesthood,
And defieth our Temple.
Away with Him!
Let Him be crucified!

Tenor Solo (Pilate)

I meddle not
With your faith or your worship.
Let your own High Priest
Condemn or acquit Him.

Chorus

Let Him be crucified!
Barabbas! Barabbas!
Release unto us Barabbas!

Tenor Solo (Pilate)

Barabbas! He whose hands are stained with blood!
While this poor visionary harmeth none?

Chorus

Barabbas! Barabbas!
Give us Barabbas!
Away with this fellow!
Let Him be crucified!

Soprano Solo (Pilate's Wife)

Oh Pilate, hear my words[voice]!
Have nought to do, I pray thee, with this Man;
For in my dreams
Much have I been perplexed concerning Him.

I dreamt that He Who meekly stands
Before us now, was crucified!
But from His Cross a glory shone
That lighted all the years to be,
And they that looked toward that light
Found rest.

I dreamt that He Whose weary head
On earth no resting-place could find,
Reigned in a city far away,
Where sin and anguish never came,
And tears of sorrow all were dried
For aye.

I dreamt that He Whom now they scorn
Had come again in majesty;
The dead awakened at His Voice;
Before His face the nations bowed;
For He had come to reign on earth
Always.

Tenor Solo (Pilate)

Shall I crucify your King,
The King of the Jews?

Chorus

We have no king but Caesar!

Soprano Solo (Pilate's Wife)

Pilate, hear my words!
Have nought to do, I pray thee, with this Man.

Tenor Solo (Pilate)

Breath of my life, in this strange land
What other voice could plead so well
As thine, that ever since we met,
Like music on my spirit fell?
Yet not for thy sweet sake alone
Would I these frenzied men defy:
An unseen presence pleads for Him
Whom now they seek to crucify.
The fury and the hate of men
Rage round me like an angry sea;
But calm amid the tumult stands

This sad, strange Man of Galilee!
Breath of my life, dear heart of mine,
Pray to thy household gods, that they
Perchance may deign to lend me aid,
In my perplexity to-day.

Duet: Soprano and Tenor (Pilate and Pilate's Wife)

Ye mighty gods of ancient Rome!
If in your dwelling-place serene
The prayers of mortal men are heard,
Their motives read, their actions seen,
Know that I fain would mercy show/he fain would judge aright;
Condemn him/me not if he/I should fail
In this sad hour, through want of light.

Tenor Solo (Pilate)

Shall I crucify your King,
Crucify this King of the Jews?

Chorus

We have no king but Caesar,
Let him be crucified!

Tenor Solo (Pilate)

Hypocrites! Wolves!
Upon your own heads
Be the blood of the guiltless!
May the gods of my city,
And the gods of my fathers,
Judge and acquit me
Of His condemnation.

Chorus

His blood be upon us,
On us and our children!

Tenor Solo (Pilate)

Behold your King!
Take Him and go your way!

Chorus

Now lead they Jesus forth,
And in a purple robe
Clothe Him, in mockery;
And for His brow they weave a crown of thorns;
Then, smiting Him, with mocking laughter cry:

"King of the Jews, all hail!
We lowly bend to Thee.
Sceptre and robe and crown Thou hast,
And upon Calvary
Thy throne shall rise for all the world to see!

Come, Jews, and Gentiles, come!
Put on your best array!
The King Whom we with pomp have crowned
Ascends His throne to-day.
Come, all ye people and obeisance pay!

King of the Jews, stand forth,
That one and all may see
The mighty Monarch Who hath come
From out of Galilee!
Forward, in order! March to Calvary!"

V. Calvary

Chorus

Through the gateway of the city,
All along the Way of Sorrow
To Golgotha, Jesus passes.
Now He falters, now He stumbles.
For the shameful Cross is heavy,
And the sun is high in heaven.
Close around Him throng the people,
Mocking, cursing, and reviling;
And the women follow after,
Weeping for Him, and lamenting.
Way of Sorrow, Way of Sorrow,
Stained with blood and tears for ever!

Baritone Solo (Christ)

Women, weep not for One
Who soon will be at rest.
Weep rather for the fate
Of fair Jerusalem;
Weep for her sorrow in the days to [be/come].
Weep not for Me; Weep not for Me!

Chorus

Behold the Cross,
The Cross uplifted on the green hillside!
With straining limbs
They raise it on high
With its burden of pain.

Behold the King!
The King of sorrow, crown'd with many thorns!
Mark how His feet
And His hands have been nailed
To that terrible throne.

Behold the Love,
The Love Divine of Him who suffers there,
Patiently bearing
Sorrow and shame
For the sins of the world.

Come down from the Cross
Thou Boaster!

Destroyer of Temples,
Miraculous Builder!
Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!
Come down from the Cross
Blasphemer!

Thou Son of God,
Thou Saviour of others,
Save now Thyself!
Come down from the Cross,
Pretender!

Thou Ruler of Israel,
Come down from the Cross
And we will believe Thee!
Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!
Where is the God, then,
In Whom Thou hast trusted?

Choral Recitative

Two thieves with Him are crucified,

And one, whose body vainly writhes
In agony unspeakable,
Reviles the Saviour, and blasphemes;
The other, calmer in his pain,
Wistfully with his glazing eyes
Regarding Jesus, prays of Him
Forgiveness in the passing world of woe,
Remembrance in the world that lies beyond.

Baritone Solo (Christ)

Be not afraid! This mortal agony
Is but the cleansing fire
Through which thy spirit, purified, shall rise,
And, passing hence, be evermore at rest
In Paradise.
Be not afraid! The mist will roll away,
And thou shalt see
The brightness of the better world beyond,
The rapture of the blessed ones at rest
In Paradise.
Be not afraid! Before yon scorching sun
His course hath run,
Thy sins forgiven and thy suffering o'er,
Thou shalt be with Me in the healing shade
Of Paradise.

Chorus

At the Cross their vigil keeping
Through the long, long hours of sorrow,
Kneel the faithful women, weeping,
Suffering as women suffer
When the ones they love are tortured,
And they have no power to save them.

Trio

Mary, the Mother of Christ
Son of mine, my tears are falling,

As I watch Thee bleeding, dying
For the sinners who reject Thee;
And I cannot see Thy glory
Through the mist of doubt and sorrow.

Mary Magdalene

Friend of sinners, I am kneeling
At Thy feet in bitter anguish;
And my very soul is pierced
By the cruel thorns that wound Thee,
By the nails that tear and rend Thee.

Mary, the wife of Cleophas

Master, Master, I am praying,
Praying to the Lord, Thy Father,
That He give Thee strength to suffer,
In this hour of tribulation,
In this hour of pain and darkness.

All (Three Marys)

Son of Man and Friend of Sinners,
Saviour of the meek and lowly,
Helper of the weak and helpless,
We are weeping, we are praying,
At Thy Cross in sorrow kneeling.

Chorus

Lo! at the sixth hour, over all the land
The darkness falls;
The noonday sun in heaven is blotted out;
And in the fields
The cattle, humble children of the Lord,
Affrighted stand.
Pale faces gather in the darkened streets,
Wild eyes are raised towards the awful sky,
And terror reigns,
For three long hours, supreme in every heart.



Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

Baritone Solo (Christ)
My God! My God!
Hast Thou forsaken Me?

Chorus
He calleth Elias!
Now we shall see
Whether Elias
Will come and deliver Him.

Baritone Solo (Christ)
Father, into Thy hands
My spirit I commend!
It is finished!

Trio (Three Marys)
It is finished!

Chorus
It is finished!

Soli and Chorus
It is finished, He hath triumphed!

Final Chorus
Christ hath triumphed, Christ hath triumphed!
Sin and Death to Him shall yield,
For the work of our salvation
With His blood for aye is sealed.

Lo! the solid earth is shaken,
Lightnings flash along the skies,
And the quiet dead, awakened,
From their riven graves arise.

Hark! a song of triumph rises
O'er earth's tumult, far away;
'Tis the choir angelic singing
In the land of perfect day!

Surely He Who meekly suffered
Shame and grief and pain untold.
Was in truth the Man of Sorrows
Promised by the Seer of old.

Surely He Whom men rejected
Was the Son of God most High!
Conqueror of Sin and Satan,
Lord of all Eternity!

Alice Parsons (1872–1934)
Bryan Anthony Ijames, Editor



