

Psalm 34:19
It is Well with My Soul
December 14th, 2022

Psalm 34:19 reads:

**Many are the afflictions of the righteous;
but the Lord delivers them out of them all.**

Often it doesn't seem that way. It seems that we are stuck in our afflictions, but as we reflect on them, we come to understand that God often doesn't deliver us out of the afflictions but provides us a way through them as he walks by our side.

The hymns and songs we sing at church they give voice to the agonies of our hearts, and our hopes and dreams that God will see us through to the other side. Hymns take over where words fail. I have us sing as a church "For All the Saints" when a member dies, for often, because of my own grief, my words fail.

Hymns encourage us and give us strength and comfort in time of trial and sorrow.

I once did a survey of people's favorite hymns and I was impressed by how many of the hymns they chose spoke of the desire for "Assurance", assurance of God's love, assurance of God's presence and assurance of our forever home in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Hymns of assurance, at times we sing them with great faith and hope, at other times we sing them holding desperately to the promises they hold. They meet our needs in times of great joy and great sorrow.

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Such a hymn we sang today "It is Well with My Soul". It is based on the knowledge that the righteous suffer. It is also based on the words of the Shunammite woman from 2 Kings 4:26 who when asked by Elisha's servant how she was replied, "It is well"... even though her heart was breaking over her son's death.



This hymn was written by a rich Chicago lawyer, Horatio Spafford, in 1873. You might think, “Yeah, a rich Chicago lawyer can easily say, ‘It is well with my soul’ for what would he have to worry about?”

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But my friends you can own the world and still be unhappy and no life is untouched by sorrow. Job 5:7 says, “Humans are born to trouble as surely as sparks fly up from a fire.”

In 1870 the Spafford’s only son died of Scarlet Fever. The following year Horatio lost most of his fortune in the great Chicago fire, because it had been invested in real estate.

Now Horatio and his wife Anna were strong believers in Jesus. They were friends and supporters of the great evangelist D.L. Moody. They were heavily involved in their church and Christian social movements of their day.

Following the fire Horatio poured himself into the rebuilding of Chicago as a way of drowning his grief over the death of his son and helping the 100,000 people who had been left homeless by the fire.

And things went from bad to worse for Horatio and his family. In 1873 he decided to go to England to help D. L Moody and Ira Sankey in their evangelistic crusade followed by a vacation in Europe. So, he booked his family, his wife and his four daughters, on the luxurious French liner “Ville du Havre”.

At the last minute he was detained by urgent real estate business; so, he sent his family on ahead. He was soon going to join them, but on the night of November 22, 1873, the “Ville du Havre” struck another ship and sank within 12 minutes.

Of the 313 people aboard Mrs. Spafford was one of only 87 passengers and crew to survive.



She remembered her one daughter was torn from her arms as she plunged into the icy waters. Her other daughters drowned when they lost their grip on the man who was trying to save them, and they were sucked into the vortex of the sinking ship.

Anna was only saved because she landed unconscious on top of a piece of floating debris and was later found floating there alive.

She despaired of life and sought to throw herself into the frigid water to follow her daughters, but in that moment, she heard God's voice reminding her that "She was saved for a reason. She had work to do." And she immediately recalled the words of a friend, "It's easy to be grateful and good when you have so much,.. but take care that you are not a fair-weather friend to God."

And thus, my friends, the words of verse one, "When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrow like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul."

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In an Upper Room devotional there was a story of a woman who found she had a rare type of ovarian cancer. She too despaired of life until God sent into her life other cancer patients, much sicker than she, who witnessed to their faith in God through joyful living.

She wrote, "My treatment is finished, and today I feel wonderfully alive. I prayed for my deepest desire: a sure physical cure. But instead, Christ healed my spirit, replacing doubt and fear with trust and peace."

Now I believe hymns such as these take on new meaning and deepen their ability to help heal our souls when we know the stories behind them. These songs of assurance come not from the optimism of youth or the untried faith of problem less lives. They come from the fiery

furnace of trial and each word holds promise for our lives now and into the future.

The Spafford's had now lost all 5 of their children. Horatio Spafford followed his wife to England. She had earlier cabled her husband "Saved alone. What shall I do...?" The grief and despair of that message is beyond comprehension.

On the passage over to England, one evening, the captain called Horatio aside and told him, "I believe we are now passing over the place where the ship "Ville du Havre" went down."

Spafford went to his cabin and as you can imagine couldn't sleep. He said to himself, "It is well; the will of God be done." He then wrote the words to this hymn." Out of the deepest agony of his heart and loss, and deeper faith in God. He wrote this hymn we sang earlier.

Horatio and his wife Anna were faithful Christians, faithful in that they were completely loyal to God. Whatever the test, or trial, sorrow, or loss that came into their lives they turned to God, not away from God.

They reminded me of Job. He lost his children, his fortune, his health. He sat in an ash heap scraping his oozing sores with a potshard and his wife told him, "he ought to just curse God and die!" His reply though was "Shall we not indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity? In all this Job did not sin with his lips."

Life is hard, full of trials, troubles, and losses. Through the 42 years of my ministry, I have found that those in their suffering who have turned to God have not been disappointed and those who turned away despaired. I have seen people turn to life and others become the living dead.

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The Spaffords put their full trust in God. They knew their salvation and their future reuniting with their children were not controlled by the tragic circumstances of their lives, but by God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

And our desire and hope is not only for joy and peace in this life. Our hope is also in the world to come. We hold the hope that one day we will be reunited with all our loved ones who have died in the Lord, who had faith and loyalty to God, and lived that out in the good and the bad times.

I pray that this hymn soaks into your hearts and minds and is lived out in your lives. I pray you turn to God in the good times and realize in the bad times, the times of trial and sorrow, sickness, and loss that those are the most important times to turn to the Lord... and not away.

Yes, we have trials as the hymn "And Are We Yet Alive" says. We have "mighty conflicts past, fighting without and fears within," but are we not alive to do God's work here and now? God's words are the same to you as they were to Anna Spafford, "You have work to do."

Though you have experienced great suffering and loss God is not done with you. You still have a purpose and a chance to bring blessings to others. Out of your great pain and loss will come a sense of comfort and out of that comfort you can comfort another. Gerry Alberts, after the death of her husband Dale took that pain and the compassion it brought to her life and used that to minister to class after class of grief groups.

Are we not alive? Is not our salvation assured and our eternal home prepared? Let us live like it is. Let us love one another as if it is!

Let us look beyond the shadows of earth and death and look to the time when we will see God face to face and there will be "no more crying, no more mourning, no more death, and no more pain for the former order of things will have passed away." Rev. 21:4

Verse 4 of our hymn speaks of this time so let us stand and sing it again together, and in our hearts and minds imagine our loved ones who we will meet in heaven and see them face to face in the presence of God.

Let us stand and sing then remain standing for "Be Still, My Soul"

And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
even so, it is well with my soul.

It is well... with my soul,... it is well,
it is well with my soul

In Jesus' Name, Amen!