

“It is Well with My Soul”
Psalm 46:1-3 & Psalm 42

Horatio Spafford was a 43 year old lawyer and lived on the north side of Chicago with his wife, Anna, and five children - 4 daughters and a son. In 1871 his only son at 4 yrs old died of scarlet fever. A few months later, the great Chicago fire of 1871, consumed all of Spafford's real estate investments. Most tragically, over 250 lives were lost in the fire and over 100,000 people were left homeless.

Two years later, Spafford decided to take his family on vacation to Europe in association with the Moody Crusades hosted overseas.. He put his wife and four daughters on a boat though he was delayed a few days to finish up last minute business. On November 22, 1873, the ship was struck by an iron sailing vessel and sank in 12 minutes. 226 people perished at sea. Anna was rescued floating unconscious on boat debris but the four daughters were among the 226 that perished. When the survivors of the shipwreck arrived in Europe, Anna Spafford cabled her husband. Of those twenty-nine words sent, she said, “Saved alone. What shall I do?”

Spafford immediately left Chicago to join his wife. In the depths of sorrow Spafford later wrote the words to the hymn, “It is well with my Soul.” The song has been a staple for nearly 150 years and has helped untold millions of people who have found true Biblical solace in the words to It is well with my soul. Despite Spafford's sins, flaws and failings, his tragic life does nothing to diminish his early writings. God has used it. That is enough.

Horatio Spafford would later drift from historic Christianity (once a Presbyterian Elder) and move further and further toward Universalism. Some have reported that he experienced a mental health crisis in the late 1880's.. He died just before his 60th birthday. His family stayed in Jerusalem and continued what was called an “American Colony.” The genesis of this movement and subsequent work is a difficult read. This period of moving to Jerusalem and calling themselves “Overcomers” is filled with bizarre visions and prophecies and variations of end-time ideas that marked them as heretics by the Christian Churches. Further reading by one who has done the research - <https://www.janegeniesse.com/pages/priestess.html> OR <https://www.hymns4him.org/hymns/study18/> AND

<https://responsivereiding.com/2024/05/08/horatio-g-spafford-the-man-the-myth-the-tragedy-a-brief-review-of-thomas-e-corts-seeking-solace-the-life-and-legacy-of-horatio-g-spafford/>

We all come to Christ messy and full of emotion and spiritual ambition but the story of Horatio and Anna Spafford ended messy and off course - little by little.

Sermon Outline:

“It Is Well with My Soul” with Ps. 46:1-3

Thesis: *When everything around us is shaken, God Himself remains our help, hope, and peace in the midst of pain and loss.*

1. God Is Our Help Psalm 46:1

“God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.”

The Psalmist doesn't say that trouble won't come. God's word assumes trouble will come. But notice where the Psalm begins: **God**.

- Not our circumstances.
- Not our strength.
- Not our ability to understand what is happening.

Spafford begins his hymn:

“When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll...”

Application

We often want God to change our circumstances. Sometimes he does. But Psalm 46 gives us something deeper: **God gives us Himself**. When the diagnosis comes. When the relationship breaks. When the future becomes uncertain. When grief comes unexpectedly.

2. God Is Our hope - this is where strength comes from Psalm 46:1–2

We need strength to keep going in the face of loss and uncertainty. The Psalm then describes the most extreme imaginable circumstances: Hope gives strength.

“Though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea...”

Everything stable appears unstable. The earth gives way. The mountains move. The sea roars. This is more than describing a bad day. It is describing **a world coming apart**. How often must we be reminded of the creation we live on, the body we inhabit - are these not perishing?

And yet: “Therefore we will not fear.”

That doesn't mean the circumstances aren't frightening. It means **fear does not have the final word**. Spafford wrote this as the hymn continues:

“Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.”

Notice the words: **“Whatever my lot.”**

- Not whatever happens, I like it.

- Not whatever happens, I understand it.
- Not whatever happens, it doesn't hurt.
- Rather: Whatever my lot—God is still God.

Application

Christian strength is not pretending we are strong.
 Christian strength is knowing where our strength comes from.
 There will be moments when you cannot carry yourself.
 That's okay. God can carry you.

3. God Is Greater Than the Calamity and Chaos - Psalm 46:2–3

The Psalm becomes increasingly dramatic:

“Though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
 though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.”

Everything is moving. Everything is shaking. Everything is loud. And yet God remains.

The biblical writers often use the sea as an image of chaos and disorder. The point isn't that believers never experience chaos. The point is: Chaos does not overthrow God.

The mountains may tremble. The waters may roar. The earth may shake. God does not.

This gives new depth to Spafford's words:

“Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
 Let this blest assurance control...”

What is the assurance?

“That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
 And has shed His own blood for my soul.”

That's the heart and hope of the gospel. That is the source of strength.

Our peace isn't ultimately found in favorable circumstances. Our peace is found in Christ.

Application

There is something wonderfully freeing about this. We don't have to understand everything in order to trust God. We don't have to know what tomorrow holds. We don't have to explain every sorrow. We simply need to know Who holds us and one day all things will be made new.

4. It Is Well Because God Is With Us Psalm 46:1–3

In 2 Kings 4:26, the Shunammite woman is asked whether all is well with her, her husband, and her son. Her response uses the Hebrew word **shalom**, a word associated with peace, wholeness, and well-being. Yet her circumstances were anything but peaceful. Her son had died. And still she could say: “**It is well.**” Spafford makes a similar point.

Spafford doesn't say:

"My circumstances are well."

He says:

"It is well with my soul."

Those are very different things. Your circumstances can be painful while your soul rests in God. Your heart can grieve while your soul trusts. You can shed tears and still have peace. You can say, "I don't understand," and still say, "I trust You." Because Christian peace is not the absence of sorrow. Christian peace is the presence of God in the middle of sorrow.

Until that day when our Faith becomes sight, we live somewhere between roaring waters and foaming seas and the soon coming reality of Shalom - eternal peace in a place of peace. Chaos will be gone. Sorrow will be removed. Death will be no more. And the memory of all that is wrong in us and the world will be erased.