

# IT IS WELL

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*Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain - Philippians 1:18-21*

Behind the curtain of this incredibly powerful and timeless Hymn, there is a great story of faith to be told that belongs to Horatio Spafford (1828-1888). He was a successful and prominent Chicago lawyer, who's business was thriving. He owned many properties throughout the city. He and his beloved wife had four beautiful daughters and one son. Life was more than just good - it was blessed.

But faith, no matter how great, does not spare us from adversity.

Just as Horatio hit the pinnacle of his profession and financial success, things began to take a turn. Their young son died with pneumonia in 1871, and in that same year, much of their business was lost in the great Chicago fire. Nearly every real estate investment Horatio owned had been destroyed.

Just a couple years later in 1873, Horatio decided to treat his wife and daughters to a much-needed escape from the turmoil. He sent them on a boat trip to Europe, with plans to join them shortly after wrapping up some business in Chicago. Just a few days later, he received a dreadful telegram from his wife, "Saved alone..." It bore the excruciating news that all four of his daughters had perished. The ship had slipped beneath the dark waters of the Atlantic, carrying with it 226 of the passengers including the four Spafford children.

A sailor, rowing a small boat over the spot where the ship went down, spotted a woman floating on a piece of the wreckage. It was Anna, still alive. He pulled her into the boat, and they were picked up by another large ship which, nine days later, landed them in Cardiff, Wales. It was from here that she sent the heart-wrenching news to her husband.

Horatio was on his way to meet his heartbroken wife, passing over the same sea that had drowned and swallowed the lives of his four precious children. It was then that he put his pen to paper and the incredible hymn was born, beginning with the words:

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,

When sorrows like sea billows roll;

Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,

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

## THE SECRET TO CONTENTMENT

How Spafford faced his pain and what his now famous words point us to is that regardless of what we are going through, Jesus teaches us to anchor our souls in something deeper. It is when we hope in the unchanging grace of Christ, His gospel, and the glory that awaits us that we can sing and believe it is well with our souls. The Apostle Paul himself shared Spafford's sentiment:

I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11–13 ESV)

Paul and Spafford alike knew there is a secret to facing the whole range of circumstances in life. This song invites us into the secret by taking our eyes off our circumstances to dwell instead on our freedom from sin through the cross.

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought! My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more, Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

With these lyrics, we lift our eyes to the incredible eternal reality that our sin has been removed from us by the cross of Christ. For it was through Christ's work that God "[forgave] us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:13–14 ESV).

The cross now stands as our payment, clearing our eternal debt and reconciling us with God. What a glorious thought!

## PEACE WITH GOD

Now how does the forgiveness of sin help us in a time of suffering? Though seemingly unrelated on the surface, herein lies precisely where our joy and steadfastness can be found in even the worst trials—God's forgiveness made possible our unity and peace with Him.

Christ's work on the cross absorbed our punishment and removed our condemnation, making God's heart toward us one of a Father toward a child. Thus, we can know that whatever trials or pain we experience flow directly from the kind heart of a God who loves us. Therefore, we praise the Lord and sing, "It is well with my soul."

## A GREAT HOPE

At the song's closing, we acknowledge that we do not merely endure these present sufferings knowing that God is for us. We also look forward with eager longing to the day when Jesus returns:

And Lord, haste the day when the 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.

There is indeed coming a day when Jesus will return to rule and reign on the earth. "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4 ESV). We Christians are a people who live this life with a great hope, and when we sing "It Is Well" we not only remember our hope, we are compelled to live in light of it.

## IS IT WELL?

God has given us a merciful gift in music authored in the midst of great tragedy. A song often has the power to express and comfort pain when words alone feel empty. Again, and again, "It Is Well" has met and carried saints through the worst kinds of suffering, reminding us of the deep, abiding, sovereign "Well" at the bottom of our joy and life.

Have you known that kind of peace in the midst of chaos in your life? Have you felt God's love when you've walked through a tragedy? Is there something big and strong and comforting at the bottom of your responses to discouragement, disappointment, and loss?

The last note in every loss is joy, because nothing — no news, no one, no event, no loss — can take Christ and his love from me. Not even death. When I close these eyes for the very last time, that moment of greatest, deepest loss will be "Gain." And Lord haste the day when my faith shall be sight. We can have peace, and faith, and even joy when we lose everything, because we never lose everything. Regardless of what happens here on this earth, we'll spend eternity enjoying the God who became like us, gave his life for us, rescued us from our sin, and delivers us to a full and never-ending life.

“It Is Well,” is a reminder that our worship of God should not be based on our circumstances but based on who God is. Will your circumstances dictate your worship, or will your worship dictate your circumstances? This is one of the chief struggles of the Christian life. Horacio’s story proves that despite our circumstances, we can have true peace and well-being with God and while this hymn echoes of pain and suffering it also points to the eternal hope that all believers have.

In Christ, it can be well for you whatever the circumstance. He died for you. He sympathizes with your pain. He stays with you. And he promises to deliver you to himself, where he will forever guard you perfectly from sin, death, suffering, and grief. Christ is our key to suffering well in the various storms of life.

**What storm or difficult situation are you facing at this very moment?**

**Take some time with The Lord to pour truth over those situations in prayer...**

*Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened ... and you will find rest for your souls” Matthew 11:28-29*

*And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, shall keep your hearts, your minds through Christ Jesus. - Philippians 4:7*