

IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL WEEK 6

For six weeks, one of which we were homebound by snow, we have studied, dissected, discussed, and hopefully come to grips with the truth that trials, tribulations, troubles, and disasters are to be faced with an attitude totally contrary to our natural inclination. Come on now, girls, say it with me! “Count it all joy when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance/perseverance.” James 1:2-3. Hopefully by now we can see those words on the inside of our eyelids and more importantly inscribed in the depths of our hearts. This will be the last time we camp on this truth for a while. Before we leave it and move on, I would like for us to reflect on a person in history who truly lived James 1:2-3. Music has always been a passion of mine; all types, but especially music that tells of the wonder, love, glory, mercy, grace, forgiveness, awesomeness, and keeping power, etc. of our Lord God Almighty. In my book, there is no hymn ever written that more powerfully expresses the truth of James 1:2-3, lived out. That song is “It Is Well With My Soul.”

The man who wrote it suffered unspeakable tragedy in his life and yet he trusted God with all of it. This powerful song expresses all the truths of James 1:1-12. In the event you don't know the history, the following tells the story of how this song came to be written:

“Horatio G. Spafford was born on October 20, 1928 in North Troy, New York. He was a successful lawyer in Chicago who maintained a keen interest in Christian activities, deeply spiritual and devoted to scriptures. Sometime in 1871, a fire in Chicago heavily devastated the city, and months before that, Spafford had invested hugely in real estate by the shore of Lake Michigan. The disaster greatly wiped out his holdings. Before the fire Spafford also experienced the loss of his son.

Two years after the fire, Spafford planned a trip to Europe for him and his family. He wanted a rest for his wife and four daughters and also to assist Moody and Sankey in one of their evangelistic campaigns in Great Britain. He was not meant to travel with his family. The day in November they were due to depart, Spafford had a last minute business transaction and had to stay behind in Chicago. Nevertheless, he still sent his wife and four daughters to travel as scheduled on the S.S. Ville du Havre, expecting to follow in a few days. On November 22, the ship laden with his wife and daughters was struck by the Lockhearn, an English vessel, and sank in a few minutes.

After the survivors were finally landed somewhere at Cardiff, Wales, Spafford's wife cabled her husband with two simple words, "Saved alone." Shortly after, Spafford left by ship on his way where his beloved four daughters had drowned, and pen in hand, wrote this most poignant text so significantly descriptive of his own personal grief---'When sorrows like sea billows roll---.' The hymn 'It is Well with My Soul' was born.

It is noteworthy that Horatio Spafford did not dwell on the theme of life's sorrows and trials. Instead, he focused in the third stanza on the redemptive work of Christ, and in the fourth verse, anticipates His glorious second coming."

Horatio Spafford and his wife lost everything dear to them, all five children. Prior to the loss of their girls, they suffered extreme financial loss. The playing field was leveled and this prominent, God-loving and serving family experienced and endured trials that none of us hope to ever encounter. Truly, his response to the tragedies of his life is an example of responding the way James exhorts us as believers to respond when we suffer:

1. a joyful attitude (v.2)
2. an understanding mind (v.3)
3. a submissive will (v.4)
4. a believing heart (vv. 5-8)
5. a humble spirit (v. 12)

As you read the verses and chorus of this amazing hymn, reflect on James 1:1-12 and look for examples of the responses to tragedy from James that Spafford exemplified as he put pen to paper to express His faith and trust in God.

It is Well with My Soul

When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll; What ever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul."

Though satan should buffet, tho' trials should come, Let this blest assurance control, that Christ has regarded my helpless estate, And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin---O 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!

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.'

Chorus: It is well, (it is well) with my soul, (with my soul) It is well with my soul, It is well, it is well with my soul.

Now, as you let the words and declarations of this song permeate your heart and mind, ponder these questions:

Do I truly trust You, Lord?

Do I understand and believe that no matter what happens, God is working it together for good in my life?

Can I say, and mean it, "It is well with my soul"?

Read the following verses:

Romans 8:28

Psalm 46:1

Psalm 103:2

Write a prayer, poem, letter (however you want to express it) telling our Great God what is in your heart in light of the previous verses and what we have read about Horatio G. Spafford.

May we all, in the face of tribulation, be able to say with all sincerity and passion of heart, "I count it all joy because I know my God is with me, He will make beauty from ashes, restore the years the locusts have eaten away, and it is indeed, 'Well with my soul.'"