

It Is Well With My Soul

~Other Speakers G-L: Hymn Stories:

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" -Psalm 46:1

This beloved gospel hymn text's author, Horatio Gates Spafford, had known peaceful and happy days as a successful young attorney in Chicago, Illinois. He was the father of four lovely daughters, a deeply spiritual and devoted student of the Scriptures, and a loyal supporter and friend of D. L. Moody and many of the other evangelical leaders of his day. Then he experienced a series of calamities, beginning with the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, which wiped out much of the family's real estate investments.

Two years later, when Moody and Ira Sankey left for Great Britain to conduct an evangelistic crusade, Spafford decided to lift the spirits of his family by taking them on a vacation to Europe. He also planned to assist with the Moody-Sankey meetings. Interestingly, it is reported that shortly before leaving, the family attended a service in Chicago where Moody was preaching. At that meeting all four Spafford girls made personal professions of Christ as Savior.

In November of 1873, at the time of the family's scheduled departure, Horatio was detained unexpectedly by some urgent business matters, but he sent his wife and four daughters as planned on the S.S. Ville du Havre, promising to join them shortly in Europe. Halfway across the Atlantic Ocean, the ship was struck by an English vessel and sank in twelve minutes. All four of the Spafford daughters--Tanetta, Maggie, Annie, and Bessie--were among the 226 passengers who drowned. Mrs. Spafford was one of the few who were miraculously rescued. As Horatio was busily packing, there was a knock at the door, and he was handed a cable which read simply: "Saved alone. Your wife."

Horatio Spafford spent hour after hour on the deck of the ship carrying him to rejoin his sorrowing wife in Cardiff, Wales. It is said that when the ship passed the approximate area where his precious daughters had drowned, Spafford received sustaining comfort from God that enabled him to respond, "When sorrows like sea billows roll--whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, it is well with my soul."

Philip P. Bliss, a prolific writer of early gospel music, was so impressed with the experience and expression of Spafford's text that he soon composed the well-suited music. The hymn was first published in 1876 in one of the Sankey-Bliss hymnals, Gospel Hymns Number Two. It still ministers mightily.

Ask yourself if you can say with Horatio Spafford, "It is well with my soul, " no matter what may be the circumstances that God allows.