

5.10.2020 Fourth Sunday After Easter (Job 19:21-27)

It Is Well With My Soul

Horatio Spafford was a prosperous lawyer, real estate investor, and a devout member and elder in the Presbyterian church. In the year 1871, he and his wife were living a good and comfortable life with their four young daughters when the Great Chicago Fire broke out and devastated their city. The fire killed at least 300 people, left more than 100,000 homeless, and destroyed \$200 million in property including Horatio's real estate investments and law firm. Two years after the fire their finances were dwindling, yet to benefit his wife's health, Horatio made plans to travel with his family to Europe, but just before they were about to leave Horatio was detained by real estate business, so his wife Anna and their four daughters went ahead without him.

In the early morning hours of November 22, 1873, their ship bound for Paris was struck by another vessel and sank in just twelve minutes. Anna was found by the crew of the other ship, unconscious on a piece of floating debris, but their four daughters were lost. Nine days later Anna arrived in Cardiff, Wales, and sent Horatio a message that said, "Saved alone. What shall I do..." Horatio left Chicago immediately to bring his wife back home, and as he crossed the Atlantic the ship's captain called Horatio to his cabin to tell him that they were sailing over the location where his four girls had drowned. As he passed over their watery grave, he wrote a poem that was later set to music. This poem would become the great hymn, *It Is Well With My Soul*.

It is well with my soul... It's easy to imagine a prosperous lawyer, successful real estate investor, and father of four girls writing these words on a beautiful summer afternoon, but Horatio Spafford wrote this poem when he was literally in the middle of enduring what was certainly the darkest, most devastating time in his life. His story reminds us that one of the greatest paradoxes of our faith is the fact that Christians find surpassing peace while in the midst of the most difficult circumstances. As I consider the tragic events that led this man to declare "It is well, it is well, with my soul," I'm reminded once again of the truth that the peace of God passes all understanding.

Jesus said to His disciples, "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto*

you: not as the world gives, give I to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). Our Savior doesn’t offer the kind of shallow, superficial, fleeting peace that the world does. His peace is not a found in law degrees or real estate investments, in land, houses, possessions or circumstances. God’s peace is not found in where we are or in what we own, but in Who He is. We find the peace of God not in our lives, but in our Lord, and so we learn that the more we know Him, the more we know peace.

We came to the same conclusion two weeks ago when we read the 23rd Psalm, and considered the personal way in which David spoke of Almighty God as *his* Good Shepherd, the One who makes *me* to lie down in green pastures, the One who leads *me* beside still waters, the One who restores *my* soul. The language David used in his psalm clearly communicates the intimacy of his relationship with God, an intimacy that brought him peace even in life’s darkest valleys. In David’s example we learn that the Bible we read and the religion we practice is a gift meant to guide us into a personal relationship with our Creator.

David spoke of the Infinite and Almighty Creator of Heaven and Earth in the most intimate way, and in our Old Testament reading this morning we find the same kind of personal language used by Job. As you know, the Bible describes Job as a man who “*was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil*” (Job 1:1). Like Horatio Spafford and king David, Job was abundantly blessed by God. He was wealthy, had a large family, and great herds of livestock. Yet in the course of one day, his animals, his servants, and his ten children were all killed, some at the hands of men, others because of natural disasters, and if this wasn’t already too much for any one person to endure, Job was then afflicted from head to toe with horrible skin sores.

These tragic events he endured are described in the first two chapters of the book of Job, and the next thirty-four chapters are dedicated to the difficulty we have in understanding why a good and just God would allow such suffering, especially in the case of a righteous man like Job, a man who God Himself said deserved none of this (Job 2:3). The passage we read this morning is taken from the middle of this book, at a time in which Job is faithfully struggling to accept his circumstances, and sees himself as a dying

man with no hope left at all in this earthly life. It's at this point that Job, who has lost his family, his fortune, and his health; Job, whose friends were convinced that it was all his fault; Job, whose own wife told him to "*curse God, and die*" (Job 2:9); it is here, in the eye of the storm, in the darkest part of the valley, that Job proclaims: "*I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another*" (Job 19:25-27).

In the darkest, most devastating time in his life, Horatio Spafford wrote: *It Is Well With My Soul*, in the valley of the shadow of death, David wrote: "*I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me,*" and when Job lost his family, his fortune, and his health, he declared: "*I know that my Redeemer lives...*" These men of great faith all found surpassing peace while in the midst of unimaginable trials because their hearts, souls, and minds were fixed on One infinitely greater than their current circumstance, the Redeemer they all knew and called their own. In their example we see that a personal relationship with Christ our Redeemer is the only way to find true, surpassing peace in the midst of this uncertain, ever-changing life.

As I thought about these men and considered how quickly they went from being on top of the world to feeling crushed under the weight of the world, I was reminded of how our lives can change in the blink of an eye. The fact that life can change so quickly is the reality we've all had to confront lately, and as we continue to walk this difficult path, it is my prayer that you'll think about the examples we talked about this morning, and by doing so, you'll find that a personal, intimate relationship with our Lord is the key to finding peace in every circumstance.

I'll leave you with a quote from R.C. Sproul that condenses the message of this sermon into a single sentence. He said, "The issue of faith is not so much whether we believe in God, but whether we believe the God we believe in." You see, simply believing in God won't bring any comfort to a person who lost his four daughters at sea, it won't help a man who's in the valley of the shadow of death, and it won't bring peace to one who's lost his family, his fortune, and his health. However, if we believe the God we believe in, then we know that our Redeemer lives, we fear no evil for God is with us, and

even in the most difficult circumstances, if we believe the God we believe in, then we can say, Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know, It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Believe the God you believe in.