

July 23 2017

**Reading from the Bible** Isaiah 43:1-3, 8-13

**Sermon** *It Is Well with My Soul* (DVD)

Isaiah 43: 1-3

I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

Isaiah 40: 28-31

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 41:10

Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

Remember the story when God's people were in exile and were captives in Babylon. They lost everything. People face adversity in many different ways. There was a recent newspaper story about a woman whose wedding and reception was canceled. I don't know the reason why her \$30,000 wedding reception was canceled but she decided to invite almost 200 homeless people to the non-event. She said, "Now I will have some happy memories." She turned her own heartbreak into joy for the local community. We often see military wounded who do extraordinary things with all kinds of medical prosthetics. We find these stories in the good news section of newspapers. And then there is Rose, Elmer and Brenda. Brenda died in a plane crash when she was a freshman at Whitworth College about 50 years ago and her family never got over it. I bet her room was preserved for at least 20 years just the way she left it. Elmer moved into the basement and Rose stayed upstairs. I don't know if they got divorce or not but they were never happy again. They had nothing from which to draw them from the deep despair of the past. They bonded with another family who lost their son the same day but never moved forward.

Christians try to comfort others. Sometimes we say God will never give me more than we can handle. That statement sometimes makes me gag. Do you think that everything that is bad that happens to us is because God is making it happen or testing us? Maybe God is testing my faith? Where is God? What does God want? Does God play games with us? I don't think so. I don't think that is God's way. God promises to be with us and for us and he sent Jesus to prove that.

The hymn, "It Is Well With My Soul" a beautiful comforting hymn. We are Now going to find out about the story behind the hymn.

**This portion of the message was on a DVD.**

“This story carries a tremendous message. The text is beautiful and it is Biblical. It portrays great truth that you and I know exists. It comes from a broken heart-the story of a man who went through three tragedy experiences and became a cornerstone of the church.

At the end of the Civil War, Chicago, Illinois became the gateway to the American west. Big businesses flourished along the shores of Lake Michigan. The population tripled in less than a decade. There were roads connecting half the continent and intersecting in the heart of the city. There were signs that Chicago was a metropolis. As Chicago grew so did the fortunes of anyone who had the money and had ambition. One of these men was Horatio Spafford. He came from New York State and was soon well on his way to being a wealthy man. He was a lawyer and was knowledgeable in real estate. He did lots of closing, made and sold bargains and made money in anything that he was involved in. He profited from his investments in real estate, but he considered material wealth only a fragment of his true fortune. His reputation for integrity earned him the respect of his peers throughout the city. He adored his family, Anna and their young children. He had the entire support of both his church and the ministry of evangelist Dwight L. Moody. He found tremendous spiritual fulfillment and was over whelmed by his prosperity. He frequently observed that he had been blessed beyond measure. But beginning in 1871 while he was rich in many ways, he soon became wrecked by tragedies. That winter Horatio and Anna's only son died of scarlet fever. Several months later, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October while the family was grieving their loss, disaster struck again. Within 24 hours most Chicago's downtown area and north side homes were destroyed. 300 people lost their lives and 98,000 were left homeless. People were driven into the lake to try to save their lives and there were millions of dollars' worth of damage. It wiped out Horatio Spafford's real estate investment. It was an extreme tragedy for him and thousands of others. Despite of it all, he went to work after the fire helping friends who had suffered even greater setbacks than his own. By the fall of 1873 the reconstruction of Chicago was still years from competition. Spafford's friend Dwight L. Moody

traveled to England to continue his ministry. In November Horatio decided to follow the evangelist overseas hoping that a change of scenery would lift the spirits of his family. He purchased six fares for the ocean liner Ville du Havre. It was one of the finest ocean vessels in the world. However, on the day before the Spaffords were scheduled to leave Chicago he received word that he was needed at an urgent business meeting regarding some property he had lost in the fire. In spite of his obligations he insisted that his wife and daughters leave for England without him. He hoped to join them in a few weeks. On November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1873, the ocean liner departed from New York City. Four days into the voyage the ocean liner collided with the iron-clad Scottish freighter Lochearn in deep fog in the Atlantic. It sunk in less than 12 minutes. 226 passengers including Spafford's four daughters perished at sea. An hour after the accident Anna Spafford, barely alive and clinging to a piece of wreckage, was pulled from the icy waters. Several days later the rescue ship reached Cardiff, Wales. Anna wired her husband in Chicago with a two word message---"Saved alone." Horatio, had faced the death of his infant son, the devastating financial setback, and now he faced the death of his beloved daughters. In spite of unimaginable pain Horatio clung to his faith in God. Confiding to a friend he said. "I am glad to trust the Lord when it costs me something." He immediately booked passage on a ship bound for England to join his grieving wife. The journey was long and Horatio spent the hours deep in prayer and meditation. Four days into the trip, the captain told Spafford, "I believe we are passing over the spot where the Ville du Havre went down." A torrent of emotions rushed from his broken heart, as the grieving father gazed at the watery grave of his children. I am sure he reminisced with Job in the Bible, his children were dead and they were gone. He said later that he went through some emotions that he had never experienced in his life before but through it all, it seemed all of sudden the light of God's promises began to shine in his heart. He said, "I couldn't do anything else but express it in the way I had a gift for. I wasn't a poet by trade but I loved to write poetry." Without a moment's hesitation, the testimony began to flow from his heart through his pen. In that moment sorrow became hope and Spafford found strength by the truth that one day he would be reunited with his children in Heaven. He returned to his cabin and penned one of the most profound portions of faith ever recorded.

*When peace, like a river, attended 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.*

It was marvelous the way that he wrote the poem. He was on the sea and he painted a word picture that we are also on the sea of life. For all the troubles whatever we go through, whether it be financial or physical, through it all God will

never leave us. He will not forsake us and though the body can be hurt the soul is well.

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1875, two years after the accident Horatio and Anna Spafford visited with neighbors and friends and that afternoon he shared his poem with the renowned Philip Bliss, one of the great composers of sacred music. Bliss was so moved by the power of Spafford's poem that he sat down at the keyboard and within moments wrote the music to the poem. It was a hymn that would give comfort and hope to countless people."

In the time that it took for us to watch that DVD movie, was the same time that it took for the ship to sink. Twelve minutes.

The Spaffords would end up with a couple more kids and with one more son dying. Their daughter Bertha recorded some of the memories from her mother. If you want to know more about the story use the web site for the Library of Congress and they have all the original documents. The telegram is not accurate it said, "Saved alone. What should I do?" The governess survived. Horatio probably knew about the sinking of the ship before he got the telegram. Only 27 people survived and one of them was his wife. He spent a lifetime of preparation developing his strong and trusting relationship with Jesus Christ and that proved itself as it gave him strength to face all his tragedies. It gave him inspiration for the hymn that would comfort so many. But that is not the whole story.

Horatio and Anna were Presbyterian and eventually they formed their own circle. There was a tremendous booklet written about his theological belief. he was Presbyterian but he was an Armenian that doesn't mean he was from Armenia but it means he believed theologically that people have a choice to follow Jesus. It sounded like universal salvation. Jesus wanted all people to be saved. I think he would have made a grand UCC member from the things that I read.

He met with these folks in the their circle, and they got to talking. They decided that when the Jews went back to Jerusalem that was the beginning of the Last Days and that meant Jesus was coming soon. That belief is popular today and especially when the state of Israel was formed. Horatio helped the people after the Chicago fire. And even before that he was anti-slavery; he was for women suffrage; he strongly believed in the evangelism of Jesus Christ. He and the group moved to Jerusalem. He eventually died of malaria but not before he did he established a sort of utopian society. He and his friends settled there and began to do humanitarian work in Jerusalem. After he died Anna continued that positive work even through the ups and downs of World War 1. Because they were American they could have been kicked out but instead they were honored because they took over and manned hospitals, they took care of refuges. Eventually in the 1920s Bertha and sister Grace, daughters, took over the work.

The story is told that one Christmas Eve Bertha was hurrying home to meet her husband to go to Bethlehem, she met a Bedouin and his sick wife and newborn baby riding a donkey. They found the hospital closed to out-patients because of the holiday. It reminded Bertha of the story of the Virgin Mary. They, too, found no room. Bertha was greatly moved by their problem and with help had them admitted to the hospital. The wife died the next day and the Bedouin pleaded with Bertha to take his baby son. He said if he took the baby home, it would die soon. Bertha took the baby boy and named him Noel. She hired a nurse and found a home for him. Within a week she was asked to take in several other young orphans and later founded the Spafford's Children's Home. It still exists.

So contrary to Elmer and Rose who never got over their loss and grief, the Spaffords' dream and vision of giving hope to the hopeless and help to the helpless lives on. Their vision was serving needy children and other others to the underserved population on the West Bank. They served children so they could meet their full development. Help was given to anyone in need regardless of race or religion. The staff was of all different faiths working together for a common cause. Horatio not only wrote a wonderful hymn that has been a blessing to thousands but he made a decision to live it out in the utopian colony with a passion in serving others.