



It is well; the will of God be done

²⁶ But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:26-27)

This devotion on the Hymn – When Peace Like a River – is dedicated to the honor of Mrs. Sarah Menzies-Grierson of Newcastle, England (the wife of the Rev. Geordie) who, though suffering from a serious threat of cancer, has that peace of which the hymn refers so beautifully. We love Sarah, our sister, and pray for both her own well-being, as well as that of her husband, as they place their trust in that only secure and certain Depository which is Christ. Sarah has placed her full faith and confidence in that Hand which has held and caressed her from her early faith, and God will always respond to that faith. I believe this hymn to be one of Sarah's favorite hymns.

This hymn is not included in the 1940, or 1982, Hymnal to the discredit of both, for it is beautiful in every way. It was written out of a heart that had lost the treasures of four daughters at sea in the North Atlantic. The writer of the lyrics of this hymn was Horatio Spafford. The music was composed by the notable hymn-writer, Philip Bliss, just shortly before his own death in a tragic train wreck. The tune is Ville de Havre, taken from the name of the ship.

In 1873, Horatio Spafford had endured several calamities that might set back such a fellow from the joy of life. The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 had destroyed his wealth. At the same period, he lost his only son to scarlet fever at age 4. He applied himself diligently as an attorney and at rebuilding his life's savings. In 1873, he was invited by D.L. Moody to participate in revival services in England. He agreed to go, gleefully, but a last minute complication prevented his leaving immediately. Spafford booked passage on the SS Ville de Havre for his wife and four daughters with plans to join them shortly thereafter in London. In the early morning hours of November 22nd, the Ville de Havre struck an iron sailing vessel and sank precipitously into the icy waters of the North Atlantic. The four daughters of Mr. Spafford perished, but the wife survived. She cabled her husband from Cardiff, Wales, a very brief and sorrow-laden message: "Saved alone!"

The loss of four precious daughters must be overwhelming to any father. I cannot even begin to imagine how anguished I would have been by such a loss. Spafford booked passage as soon as possible on a ship to join his wife in England. On a cold, wintry night in December, at the point of sinking of the Ville de Havre, the ship's captain notified Spafford that this was the point where his daughters had gone to their watery graves. Spafford was overcome with a mountain of grief and sorrow as he peered down into the cold, murky waters of the North Atlantic. He went back to his cabin, but could not sleep. At last he thought, "It is well; the will of God be done." Suddenly, it was as if the morning sun had broken from behind a dark and foreboding cloud, an ocean of peace overflowed his heart, and he wrote the lines to this hymn.

The hymn begs the question of the meaning of true peace. The peace of God cannot be fully comprehended in the solitude of a peaceful pastoral scene on the misty green fields at the morning sunrise. True and lasting peace does not rely upon any external considerations, but rather a deep and heartfelt peace of the Sea of the Soul that stakes its hope on that habitation of God in the very Temple of the soul. The tumbling and cascading waters over the high Banks of Niagara express that peace in quantity, but not in quality. Those lazy, placid, and untroubled waters of the River Jordan are more expressive for quality.

When Peace like a River

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.

Refrain:

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

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

Refrain

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!

Refrain

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

Refrain

But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!

Refrain

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.

None of us are privileged to know what the day, or even hour, shall bring. The Clock of Heaven ticks on according to the Providence and Will of God. We may peer into the lower chamber of the hour-glass and know that many grains may have fallen, yet we know not how many grains remain in the upper chamber. *When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll; Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, It is well, it is well, with my soul.* Peace will always and forever attend the way of the child of God. It is a mark of the saint to know that even the stormy billows of the sea respond to the rebuke of God our Father. In whatever circumstance we find ourselves, we must keep foremost in our hearts the truth that God is at our ship's helm, and the ship of our soul will weather whatever gales are blowing. As Paul wisely counsels: ". . . *for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*" (Phil 4:11)

"Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, Let this blest assurance control, That Christ has regarded my helpless estate, And hath shed His own blood for my soul." The disciples, caught on the Galilean Sea in a furious tempest, were not forgotten by our Lord. He was with them, and He will calm the stormy sea. The Ship of our Soul may be caught out in the gales and billows of uncharted waters, yet He is with us, and has redeemed us, and will save us to the uttermost. ". . . *I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*" (Matt 28:20) Satan buffets, but our Lord comforts and calms – even in a restless sea.

"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!" It is a most amazing realization to us that God will not remember our forgiven sins at all. Though we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God, and we all deserve death as the wage for those sins, that sentence has been freely paid (for us) by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. Our salvation is a gift of free grace to us, yet it cost the Lord Jesus Christ the last ounce of His sinless blood, and cost the Father the pain of witnessing the Passion of His dearly beloved Son.

"For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live: If Jordan above me shall roll, No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul." I dearly love this stanza! If we are alive in Christ, how can the waters of Jordan overwhelm? *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God,*

who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Gal 2:20) It is not OUR peace that we enjoy in troubled times, but HIS!

“But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait, The sky, not the grave, is our goal; Oh trump of the angel! Oh voice of the Lord! Blessèd hope, blessèd rest of my soul!” This line comports nicely with that of another good old hymn: *“When the Trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more; and the morning breaks eternal bright and faire.”* Christians are so far indebted to Christ our Savior that we can never count the cost. The Garden Tomb of our Lord was a ‘borrowed’ tomb. You probably wish that you could have only a borrowed tomb as well. Guess what? You DO have only a borrowed tomb if you are in Christ! We shall enjoy a brief encampment in our own garden tombs until Gabriel stands upon the precipice of Heaven and blows Reveille! Then all those who are enlisted in the Army of Heaven shall awake to eternal lives and a newness of glory. The Roll will be called, and the Morning Report rendered. Our Sabbath begins in the tomb, but continues eternally in Heaven.

“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.” Do you dread the grave with anguish and fear? You would not if you had the hope of Christ buried in the Garden of your Heart. Our faith will be confirmed at the very moment of death. The old, filthy rags of this world will fall far away, and the White Robe of Righteousness of Christ shall be donned by the saint. We will then see clearly those nail scarred Hands upon which our names were cut (graven) at the cross. (Isaiah 49:15,16) Though our bodies, by the grace of God, shall have no scars, His will still bear the stripes and scars of His suffering. *“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”* (1 Cor 13:12) Did you catch that last gem of truth in Paul’s words? At present we know by faith and know in part; but at that day, we shall know Christ as intimately as He NOW knows our own hearts - Amazing Grace!