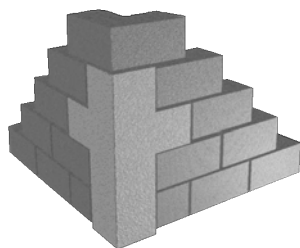


Devotion on Hymns of the Church (Hymn 564 – How Firm a Foundation) – 22 July 2014, Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)



*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 3:11)*

It is to be desired that the readers of these hymn devotions will begin to see emerge a great principle of the classical hymns – that they are inspired both in lyrics and music. Observe how tacky and meaningless most modern ‘gospel’ songs appear when compared to these jewels of doctrinal and biblical truth.

*“How Firm a Foundation”* was written and published by John Rippon in 1787. It has been a blessing to the worshippers of God of almost every denomination ever since. It was the hymn sung at the last worship service attended by both Lee and Jackson on the Sunday morning of Jackson’s being mortally wounded following his stunning victory at Chancellorsville; and it was forever after, if not before, the favorite hymn of General Robert E. Lee. There are two equally popular tunes to which the hymn is sung: *Lyons* (or *Foundation*), and *St. Denio*.

### **How Firm a Foundation**

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
is laid for your faith in his excellent word!  
What more can he say than to you he hath said,  
to you that for refuge to Jesus have fled?

"Fear not, I am with thee; O be not dismayed!  
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;  
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,  
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,  
the rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;  
for I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,  
and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,  
my grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;  
the flame shall not hurt thee; I only design  
thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,  
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;

that soul, though all hell shall endeavor to shake,  
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake."

*"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent word! What more can he say than to you he hath said, to you that for refuge to Jesus have fled?"* What is the Foundation Stone of your Faith? Is it not that Rock of Salvation that followed the Children of Israel in the Wilderness? *"Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste."* (Isaiah 28:16) Do we not all partake in that same glorious Communion of the Lord at His Table? *"And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."* (1 Cor 10:4) We partake of His Blood for Drink and His Body (the Word) for Bread. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (John 1:1) To which Man do you suppose Isaiah has reference: *"And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."* (Isaiah 32:2) The Lord Jesus Christ is our Hiding Place and the Ark of our Salvation not unlike the Ark of Noah's day. We flee to Him for refuge.

*"Fear not, I am with thee; O be not dismayed! For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid; I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand, upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand."* The Voice of the Lord is a Voice you can trust to accomplish whatsoever He promises. The message of the Lord, and even His Angels, has always been first, ***"Fear not! It is I!"*** But you may ask, "Aren't we supposed to fear the Lord?" True, especially when we are estranged from Him, but when we draw nigh to Him as a child to its Father, our fear is not mortal, but mild in reverence of His Holy Person. He gives us strength to weather the gales of the sea, and to stand upon the solid ground of His Word. He is always at the ready to pull us from the swirling waters when our faith fails us.

*"When through the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of woe shall not thee overflow; for I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless, and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress."* Remember how the Lord parted the waters of the Red Sea and His people crossed on dry ground? Do you believe He expired all of His powers with that singular miracle? He parted the Waters at Jordan Banks as well. Walking beneath the towering waters of the Red Sea took faith even if the path was dry. The Children of Israel passed over for two reasons:

1. They feared the armies of Pharaoh more than the waters of the Sea;
2. They trusted in that strong outstretched Hand of God as much as they feared Pharaoh.

God may often use love and fear to compel us to His will. Has He not promised to be with us always? ***" . . . lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."*** (Matt 28:20)

This hymn is not foretelling some new work of the Lord in caring for us, but demonstrating the care the Lord has, and has always demonstrated, for His Elect people. *"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, my grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply; the flame shall not hurt thee; I only design thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine."* We are precious metal in the eyes of the Lord, more worth than gold. But even gold and silver needs refinement, and the Lord refines us in the boiling vessel of life. He will not remove the fiery trials from our way, but He will be our Shield and

Protector through those fiery trials. He allows us to pass through in order for us to become better refined and strengthened. He scoops the dross from the surface of our natures and gradually purifies us until He can observe His own image in the polished surface of our metal.

*"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose, I will not, I will not desert to its foes; that soul, though all hell shall endeavor to shake, I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake."* We have a sure security in the Lord. I remember singing this hymn in our little country church in Tennessee. I could not understand how the Lord would defend me from all dangers even while I faced them daily. But He did! I was never consumed or destroyed though many close encounters have occurred over my life. ". . . *for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*" (Heb 13:5-6) As you read this devotion, and in your usual habits of the day, I believe the Lord stands right beside for He is *"a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."* (Proverbs 18:24)